Spider Riders: Keyblade Masters Of The Inner World

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Summary: Sora, Riku, and Kairi embark on an adventure, via a Portal to The Inner World. Here they find that The Inner World is being attacked by Invectid Heartless and Invectids who have formed Organization 13. Without The Spider Riders, the world will fall into darkness, and the trio must unite together in order to stop the ongoing threat of the Invectids.

1. It has begun

Darknessâ€¦ and then a door now opening before them. A strange talisman connecting to his arm. This was the dream Sora was trying to tell Riku and Kairi about as he leaned against one of the trees, watching the dazzling sunset that fell over Destiny Island each dusk. Sora had a quizzical expression on his face, as if he were trying to remember more. Riku flipped his hair slightly as he answered him.

"Sure, I remember the 'door' in that cave. You thought there were monsters in there, called the door a window, and then got bored. We never looked in there again." Riku explained to Kairi. Sora sighed. That's how the event had gone when him and Riku were both exploring the island as children. It was around the time when Kairi appeared on the island. Kairi giggled at the story, her long red hair and her dress flowing in sweet summer wind. She had noticed that Sora seemed sad recently, even though they were on summer vacation. She couldn't blame him. They knew this island so well that there wasn't much to do anymore. He seemed depressed, sleeping on the beach and fading into far off places where he could go on an adventure. She then decided she would indulge him.

"Well, I don't think there's a door in there at all. You guys are both lying." She teased, giving a wink to Riku. Sora crossed his arms.

"Come on, Kairi."

"Well, if it's real, you'll go back in there. That is, if you're not afraid of the monsters." She challenged him, crossing her arms and sizing him up playfully. She could have sworn she saw Sora blush in embarrassment.

"Well, fine, we'll see." Sora then started running to the Secret Place, Kairi and Riku trailing behind him.

"Good job." Riku nudged her. She gave him a small smile. The Secret Place was a winding tunnel, pitch black and damp. Riku and Kairi moved through it carefully, as they felt along the wet walls to be able to move around. Light poured in from a crack in the cave, lighting up the room. As the sun was setting, the light got dimmer.

"Hurry, before it gets dark." Kairi told Riku.

"Are you afraid now, Kairi?" Sora teased her, his voice up ahead. But Sora was alone in the dimness of the large cave, and he felt uneasy. He was feeling the walls for the door they had seen as children, but it was not there. Kairi hugged herself as she saw him, and Riku stared intently at the dead end. He knew there had been a door there before too. He stood beside Sora, who looked up at him as he walked into his view. Riku put his hand on Sora's shoulder, and Sora backed up a bit for him. Riku started feeling the wall, but could find anything. Or at least, he thought there was nothing. There was a shimmer of light, and a brief chanting noise that could be heard by the trio.

"Woah." Sora exclaimed. The door that they had seen was in front of them. "See, I told you, Kairi." He nudged her, but Kairi was in shock at what had happened.

"So you did." She whispered under her breath to herself.

"It's just like my dream, lead the way, commander!" Sora hit his back playfully, as boys often did. Riku pushed the door, but it didn't come open. It felt as though he were pushing a wall.

"Did you dream tell us where to go from here?" He asked, trying not to make it seem as if he were mocking his friend. Sora shook his head. "Well, I guess that's it then."

"No! Riku, remember there was something your dad always said to us. He said that we should never give up, and then he would raise his hand to the sky with one finger up and shout - Arachna Power!" Just as the words were spoken, Kairi and Riku knew they couldn't be taken back. The room was suddenly bathed in light, and all three of the hero's felt something clamp onto their wrist. Sora and Kairi shielded their eyes, but Riku looked at it head on. He had seen this contraption before. He heard a voice speak to him, giving him chills as the familiar memory came to him at the back of his head.

"The Manacle. The Keyblade."

And just as he thought it, the weapon appeared in his hand. The Way to the Dawn Keyblade. Why, oh why, did he know the name of this weapon. Sora looked at Riku in a bewildered admiration. He looked at his arm, and as did Kairi.

"Riku, have you seen this before?" She asked him uncomfortably. Her Manacle's gem was grey, and void of any light. Riku seemed to be in a trance now, and he used his weapon to unlock the door, and step through it. There was an idol at the front of the room of a large spider. Riku walked up to it, and his Manacle started shining.

"Riku!" Sora and Kairi both yelled in unison, as they walked as Riku fell through a hole in the floor, a multicoloured abyss that seemed to be a never ending fall. Kairi did not hesitate jumping after him.

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There was a scream within the dreary, dark, castle walls. A Queen sat on the Throne, the only radiance in an otherwise dark room left in misery and shambles. A palace, once fit for a Queen, looked abandoned, and to an extent, the inhabitants of the castle were similar - there in body, barely there in soul. The Queen, in a long, blue dress which gleamed with sapphire and golden gems, was the only light in such a dark place. She jumped at the scream, and ran across the tattered carpet on the floor of the 'great' hall. She went to her brother's royal chambers, and saw him on the floor. His crystal was shattered. She knelt down to him, his blonde hair being covered by his hands. She knew how painful it was, like strong white noise filled his skull as he saw what was transpiring.

"Ventus!" The Queen called out to him. His screams stopped, and he sat up as if nothing had happened. She looked at his crystal and her eyes widened. Then, to her astonishment and horror, two more cracks appeared. "The spirit of earthens, have crossed the path of your crystal." She spoke with fear and dread. "Ven, this is a sign of great evil to come."

Ventus looked up at her, and spoke in anger. "What does it matter, Aqua?" He barked. That expression surprised Aqua, and she had a disappointed expression on her face. "Great evil came to our world a long time ago, and it never left." He replied recklessly. Aqua stood up and turned her face from him, trying not to hide her grief. He looked at her sadly. He hadn't meant to speak so harshly.

"If we're lucky Aqua, they'll be on our side, right?" Ventus tried to finish positively, but sighed to himself as Aqua left, shutting the door behind her. When Ventus was out of earshot, Aqua let a tear drip down her face.

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Kairi woke up in the middle of a forest. The roots of trees were tangled with one another, and the sun was giant. Kairi couldn't even open her eyes for a few moments before they adjusted. Her heart was racing quickly. It was so close to the earth, or at least, the land on which they lay on. She sat up, looking at the unconscious Sora and Riku. Was this what Sora had dreamed about? The thought about it happening gave her chills. She didn't know. She didn't see another door back, but maybe only Riku could find it. She listened to the

wind rustling through the trees, making her feel at peace. She saw that the gem on her manacle had a pinkish colour to it. Her thoughts were distracted as she saw Sora stir.

"Kairi!" He shot awake. "Are you okay?". Kairi nodded. "That's good." He looked to Riku, who was still lying on the ground. Kairi put a finger to her mouth, as if saying to leave Riku be. Sora nodded.

"Well, what are you waiting for?" Kairi whispered to Sora. "If we climb up one of these trees, we'll get a much better view of this place."

"We're not kids anymore Kairi, I can't climb-"

"On my count. One, two, three." Kairi was agile and quick, while Sora was clumsy, and didn't think about which branches to step on from under him. He climbed freely, while Kairi climbed smartly. Riku, who had a splitting headache, looked up at both of them, too confused to figure out what exactly he was seeing. His vision was blurry.

Kairi took a deep breath as her hands reached the very top of the tree. She pulled herself up to stand on a branch, feeling if though she were standing at the bow of a ship. The scenery here was breathtaking. The trees were all different colours elevating the scenery beyond beautiful, ahead of that, a sandy valley at the bottom of a tall, green mountain. Kairi decided that they should go up the mountain in order to get to higher ground. She stood there for a moment, almost in shock at the wonderful place she was seeing. She made her way down to speak to Sora and Riku, when something caught her eye - through the trees, large shadows were cutting through branches violently. Her heart started racing again as she raced down to the ground. She nearly fell off the final branch.

"Sora, Riku!" She called to them. "There's something coming!" Both boys looked up towards the sky, seeing large shadows falling to the ground, covering all of the area that they were in just a second before. Kairi pulled them both behind a fallen tree branch to take cover. Her and Sora both made themselves small, while Riku looked over the branch. He was amazed at what he saw. Two grand spiders, bigger and wider than war horse and chariot, bigger than some of the boats they used to travel the island. One was of dusty red and silver, while the other was a pure black and silver. To Riku's shock, the two spiders were not only fighting, but also speaking.

"You're in my territory now, Arenite!" The black and silver spider shouted. Their voice was deep and cold.

"Come on, can't two lone spider warriors learn to get along, brother?!" Arenite replied snarkily, realizing the irony of what he was saying, webs and legs entangled in a battle. Kairi felt extremely lightheaded. She turned to look at Sora, but to her surprise, he was gone. She looked over the branch.

"Hey! Enough!" Sora stood in between the two spiders. "Time out." He raised his arm high, unknown to him, but noticed by Riku, that he was making the fact he had a Manacle known.

"Where did you get that, Earthen!?"

"He probably stole it from another Spider Rider, he's just a kid." Arenite teased.

"I'm not a kid. And I didn't steal it." Sora corrected. He was covered in their web.

"Then where's your battle spider, boy?" Sora blinked at both of them.

"Ugh, he's around." Sora lied. Kairi followed in after him, and Riku after her.

"We're sorry we interrupted your fight. We just want to go to the mountain." Kairi pointed, purposefully showing her Manacle.

"Anotherâ€¦"

Riku made eye contact with the darker Spider. He felt a chanting in his ears that filled his mind, a noise he couldn't ignore. It was the same as it was when he had fallen through the portal. He heard a voice, a radiant voice speaking to him. He heard the name of his spider. Ã‰benos. The world was spinning uncontrollably as he saw two of everything. He heard the voice telling him to say the words Sora had said before.

"Arachna power." He whispered to the Spider, though Sora, seeming to catch on yelled it delayed. A bright light shot out of both of the manacles, almost making a beacon of the entire forest. Both boys heard the voice this time. _It has begun._

2. Demyx Defeated

Not too deep inside of the forest, an Invectid saw that light. One of the invectids in the Organization 13 - Demyx. A fat, humanoid Belostomatidae with horns. It's body was brown and blue in colour, and he carried his weapon of choice, a sitar. He turned to the lesser Nobodies, the Dancer nobodies, which were also ambiguously bug like, as they were too Invectids.

"Sweet! Go tell Lord Xemnas right away. A new Spider Rider is here." He told some of the Dancer nobodies as they disappeared into the darkness. "And to make this easy for all of us, I'll just take them all out before they get started. It'll be too easy." Demyx smiled cheerfully for himself, preparing the Invectids for battle.

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"I can't believe I just got joined with a stupid earthen!" Arenite complained as they made their way through the valley.

"You heard the voice too, the voice of Kingdom Hearts. This is what must be." Ã‰benos had accepted such a fate.

"Kingdom Hearts?" Riku questioned.

"See that, that's Kingdom Hearts' sun." Ã‰benos spoke. "It's spirit

created the Inner World, and is responsible for all the beauty here. She brought the spiders and the warriors together."

"Not like they're really warriors anymore." Arenite said almost teasingly.

"Bite your tongue, little brother!" Ã‰benos scolded him.

"Did something happen to the Spider Riders?" Kairi questioned, her voice quivered. She was sitting on Riku's spider as they moved through the valley.

"There used to be 6 Spider Riders. Prince Terra, firstborn son, and Prince Vanitas, fourth born son, all went missing, as did the King's brother, Xehanort. And the Kingâ€¦ the King was struck down."

"Struck down, you mean, somebody-" Riku's mouth dropped as Arenite spoke next.

"Yup. Somebody killed him. And since then, these world all been in chaos."

Riku felt a heavy presence on him. This world was in chaos, and they were supposed to solve it? Was that why Kingdom Hearts had brought them here? It was a lot to take in. Sora though, didn't seem as trouble, and smiled as he lied back on Arenite.

"Well, we can fix it. There's nothing to it, right?" Sora shrugged cheerfully. Both Spiders jolted as a figure appeared in front of them in a black coat. Sora shot up, and Riku jumped off his Spider, ready for a fight.

"Well well, you guys are looking lively already." Demyx gave them both a winning smile.

"It's a bug!" Sora exclaimed without thinking. "Why don't you get lost?!" The bug jumped backwards in fear for a brief second, before remembering that they were supposed to be fighting.

"That's not any bug, that's one of the members of the Organization 13 Invectids, they're Nobodies. They don't have any hearts." Ã‰benos exclaimed.

"We do to have hearts. Don't be mad." Demyx smiled cockily as he crossed his arms.

"One less member, that's fine with me." Sora lifted up his arm to figure out how to summon his own Keyblade. "Kairi, stay back okay."

"I want to fight too."

"You don't have a Battle Spider. Join in next time, okay?" Riku told her. Kairi nodded reluctantly.

"You ready, Sora?" Riku turned to his friend. Sora nodded with anticipation. "On the count of three. One, two, three."

"Arachna power!" They both shouted in unison. Suddenly, they both

started to transform. Riku worn bright blue and dark blue armour, holding his Way to Dawn in his hand. His Spider had similar armor on its legs and face. Sora's was gold, red, and also a dark blue. He held the Kingdom Key. They both readied themselves at Demyx. Demyx looked around for the Dancer Nobodies, before he remembered he had sent them away in order to send a message to Lord Xemnas. He groaned at his mistake.

"No problemâ€¦ I just need to make it up." He mumbled to himself under his breath. He grabbed his sitar, and hundreds of water figures appeared in front of the spiders. They resembled Demyx, and soon Demyx became one himself.

"How do we find the real one?" Sora asked. They were surrounded.

"Start hitting them!" Riku told Sora. Riku and Ã‰benos jumped up onto one of the cliffs of the canon, and Ã‰benos started to shoot webs at the water beings below. Most of them dodged, but the ones who were hit disappeared. Soon, Riku was using his Keyblade to hack at the water-beings below him, throwing it like a boomerang and watch it destroy the water. One of the beings hit him hard with their water sitars, and he flew backwards. Ã‰benos acted fast, and put a web out to bring him back on the Spiders back. Sora was doing something similar to Riku, but then had an idea.

"Fire!" He shouted. Out of his Keyblade, fire came out, but it didn't affect the water beings. They covered him in his moment of weakness.

"Sora!" Kairi ran over to him, and started to fight the enemies in hand to hand combat.

"What a stupid Earthen." Arenite muttered to himself. He shielded Sora as Kairi destroyed some of the enemies.

"Kairi, be careful!"

"I think you're the one who needs to be careful. Try a different spell!" She shouted at him. Sora nodded.

"Deep freeze!" He shouted, successfully freezing some of the enemies. That's when Kairi broke them with her punches, and Arenite used his webs to throw them into each other.

"Now you're using your head." Kairi teased him. Between the 3 of them, soon Demyx was found, not being able to hide behind the water spirits he had made. Sora and Riku went to town on him as the Spiders tied him up by the legs. Demyx used a large wave attack, rendering the spiders useless.

"It's up to us now." Sora and Riku nodded at each other.

"Kingdom Hearts, give us strength!" Riku called upon the spirit as they dove into Demyx. Sora flied backwards after being hit by a funnel of water. Riku looked to Kairi, who dove back into the action. Kairi's kick distracted Demyx enough for Riku to pull finishing blows with the Way to Dawn. Demyx fell on the ground, and let out a final scream. Kairi hurried to help Sora, and Riku stared into the eyes of the bug.

"I don't want to fade awayâ€¦" Demyx spoke to Riku, tearfully lamenting such a sorrowful end. Riku and Sora couldn't help but wonder as he saw a tear fall down the Invectids face that if they had been tricked.

Maybe Nobodies really did have hearts.

3. Arachna Kingdom

The group had set up camp at the top of the mountain. They could see the radiant exterior of the Kingdom below as the sun turned from yellow to a light purple colour. Ã‰benos and Arenite were recovering, as Spiders did not do well in water. They both sat under the trees. They had used their webs in order to make a large hammock for Riku, Sora, and Kairi. Sora was curled into a ball on the furthest side of the hammock, while Riku and Kairi laid down with a few centimeters apart from each other. She looked up at the starless sky, and the purple sun which kept the world alive.

"There are no stars." Kairi made the observation to a wide-awake Riku.

"Someone once told me that every star is a new world. Since we're inside our own world, there wouldn't be any other worlds to see, right?" Riku told her. She couldn't see his expression, a shadow over his face, his silver hair hiding his eyes.

"If you told me yesterday we'd all be together like this, I wouldn't have believed you." She lay on her back, and she paused for a moment, her lips parting to speak. She closed her eyes. "You and Sora must be really special." Riku's face turned only the slightest bit red, before he chuckled.

"Maybe. But it's mostly Sora. Without him, we never would have got here. He remembered what it means to be a Spider Rider, even though we didn't really know that much about the Inner World." Riku looked over at the sleeping Sora, who seemed to be content with their adventuring.

"Is there something you're not telling us, Riku?" Kairi asked him. "The look on your face sometimes - you're lying to us. Or at least, you're hiding something." Kairi felt guilt as soon as the words came out from her mouth. Riku stared at her, remembering a choice he had made to keep a promise. He couldn't tell her about the mysterious man that he had once seen on the beaches of Destiny Islands as a child.

"I promised not to say, but I won't lie to you Kairi. I've seen the Manacle before, and the Keyblade."

Kairi nodded. She had known. There was a silence only to be filled by the other breathing. Kairi wished she could tell them anything other than the mayor taking in her when she arrived at Destiny Islands. Her past was unknown to them, and now so was their future. She wondered what it was like to always be the heros, like Sora and Riku. She closed her eyes, hoping that she too would get her time to show her power.

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"That's Arachna Kingdom up ahead." Ã‰benos said as they rode down the winding path of the mountain. "The Land of Departure is where the Spider Riders and other Arachna warriors depart on their missions near the castle, but the city is Arachna Kingdom."

"How do you know so much about this if you're both lone warriors?" Sora asked Ã‰benos as well as his Spider, Arenite.

"Everyone in Arachna knows that. Even the Invectids." Arenite retorted.

"But how is the Kingdom prospering if the Spider Riders are nonexistent?" Riku asked Ã‰benos, his voice serious. Ã‰benos cleared his throat.

"The Queen has great power, so much so she hardly uses all of it in battle. And soldiers are able to fight off the Invectid Heartless and Nobodies, but only the Keyblade can destroy them completely." Ã‰benos explained to the group. Kairi was lying back on Arenite when she shot up, as if she had thought something.

"Then what's the point of you and Arenite fighting them?" Kairi asked with as much grace as she could.

"It protects the people, even for a short time."

When they got to the gates of the Kingdom, Kairi, Riku, and Sora all got off their Spiders.

"We're going to go another way to get to the castle. You'll cause a commotion." Ã‰benos told the trio.

They all nodded, and the two battle spiders disappeared past the corner of the wall. The three walked into the city. People were dressed simply, and in dark colours. Most booths were selling what seemed to be fruit, and children played in the streets. There was the babble of people speaking, but none of the three could really tune into their conversations. People gave them strange looks as they walked past. No one here looked anything like them. Kairi felt the most out of place, as her red hair wasn't present in any of the citizens she could see. She felt her face flush in embarrassment. There wasn't any grass here, and buildings as well as the road was sandy. The only thing that seemed to have any trace of bright colour was the castle. And even then, the castle had clearly lost pieces. There were whole corridors that had been ripped off, and chains that may have held other pieces of the building sagged without any support. The gold was covered in dirt, and what could have been something once beautiful, was lackluster. All that seemed to be intact was the first building, and a section that protruded off of it. The group came down a courtyard, which was unguarded. There was a giant piece missing from the tile, and stairs covered in ivy leading up to the door. Something caught Kairi's eye though. In all the destruction of this place, the giant doors stood tall, and the stained glass at the front of the building still was radiant.

"What a disaster." They heard Arenite behind them, and turned to face

both of the spiders.

"I'm glad you both found your way. But how could this place be so unguarded?" Kairi asked, still looking up at the structure. In one of the windows, she could have sworn she saw someone looking at her. She narrowed her eyes, but she couldn't see from this far away. Neither of the spiders answered her. They both walked up the stairs, and opened the doors. There was a long, dark hallway. The tiles were ripped from the floor, and there was a dampness to each step. There was debris everywhere. A big chunk covered one of the doors that would have led to what Kairi assumed would be the other large building to match the counterpart. The other large brown door which led to the side of the castle was intact. They continued down the hallway, the floor covered in moist sand. They came to the end of a hallway. Kairi wouldn't admit that she was afraid of this place. It reeked of death.

"Do you think we'll find the Queen in here?" Sora asked.

"Only one way to find out." Riku replied to him. He opened the doors of the grand hall.

It was much like the rest of the rooms, covered in debris and sand. Kairi looked up at the ceiling to see another stained glass window. It shone the only light in the room despite the fact that it was broken in many places. The parts of the hall that were in one piece were adored in gold wall decoration and white walls. There were three thrones. A figure sat in one of them. Kairi looked at her, and felt a warmness develope in her heart, something that was familiar to her, and the figure she saw.

Riku couldn't help but think the women was beautiful. Her dress was the only colour in the room, other than her bright, blue hair. In a destroyed castle, she was alive, and her spirit could keep her from breaking in a world that was clearly broken. Her blue hair was to her shoulders, and her expression was a solemn one. Suddenly, her eyes seemed to open, and she had a look of recognition. Riku knelt before her, Kairi following his lead as their heads were bowed. Riku was the first to look back up at her. Her bangs slightly made a shadow which covered her eyes, and most of her face was hidden to them for a mere moment, but on her cheek he could see a tear falling from her face, and onto the cold stone.

Aqua was sure Riku had seen her reaction, but she didn't want to tell them the truth. Not yet. She had met them all 10 years ago, and Riku knew her too. He said nothing, distracted by the clear sorrow she wore on her face. Terra had chose this boy. She felt the same feeling she had when she first saw Riku. She had tried so hard to keep Sora and Riku for both gaining the power of Kingdom Hearts, but she had failed. Yet they were together, not at war with each other. And the girlâ€¦ had she been drawn to them? She stood up.

Her voice was tense, but was the voice of a ruler. "I've heard tales about you." Riku could feel his face heat up, until he realized she was not speaking to him but to his battle Spider. "You're lucky having such an ally." That's when she turned to Riku.

"Of course, your majesty." Riku nodded. Riku was still kneeling down, but Sora stood up straight, he put his arms behind his head and leaned back, a trademark of his Riku knew too well. He looked awfully

relaxed.

"Sora, come on, show some respect." Riku pulled him down.

"Hey!" Sora shook Riku off playfully.

"Forgive him-" Riku began, but the Queen was laughing. It was a sweet sound to Riku's ears.

"You make a good team." She began, her voice lighter than it had been before. "I am Queen Aqua, ruler of Arachna. I am the leader of the Spider Riders." She signaled the trio to rise. "But yet I find it a bit, hard to believe, that you all could be Spider Riders yourself." Aqua spoke very amatterafactly. She knew they were, but she wanted to test them. She had a small smile, content with herself.

"Your Majesty," Ã‰benos began, "we defeated one of the members of Organization 13, a Nobody with powerful water magic."

"Demyx. Do you mean to say that you outright destroyed him?" Aqua raised an eyebrow to the three, but looked directly at Sora. Sora blinked, and thought about what had happened back at the battle.

"Demyxâ€¦" His voice trialed off. "Heâ€¦ faded away." Sora told her.

"When a Nobody is defeated by someone with a Keyblade, they disappear forever. Isn't that what you said, Arenite?" Kairi made eye contact with Aqua.

"Sure did. And that's exactly what happened."

Aqua seemed to be hugging herself as the three spoke. Three children had been able to defeat Organization 13, while she, for 10 years, held too much grief in her heart to even step outside of her own Kingdom. She felt so foolish. She wanted to see their power.

"If you want to join the ranks of the Spider Riders, you will face me in battle." She turned around, looking up at the stain glass window to hide the rush of telling a lie.

"Alright, you're on." Sora gave a bright smile to her, ready for the fierce competition.

"There's a door right before you came in, leading to the other building. In that building is the Spider Rider training room, as well as room accommodations for the three of you."

"You expected us?" Riku asked her curiously. She nodded.

"My brother has a strange power to see visions at times, and he saw the dangerous omen of the earthen. But now seeing you here I believe that only the enemies you face will have to worry about being in danger." Aqua closed her eyes when she finished speaking, and she heard Riku, Sora, and the battle Spiders turn to go into the training room.

"This is going to be great, Riku. Just make sure you don't hog all of the fighting for yourself." Sora teased him as they opened the doors

of the great hall.

"Like you'll be able to defeat her. Let me handle it, okay?" Riku teased back.

"I can do it! You'll see, right Arenite?" Sora crossed his arms.

"I wouldn't hold your breath kid. You may have gotta lucky with that whimp Demyx, but you won't match Queen Aqua." Arenite retorted. The boys all laughed together, leaving Kairi in the middle of the room alone. When Aqua opened her eyes, she was surprised to see that Kairi was still there.

"Your Majesty." Kairi looked up at her, with a fierceness Aqua recognized in herself. "I have no Spider to be my partner, but, I too have a Manacle."

"Finding a Spider can take years." Aqua said to her. Kairi's face fell, disappointed again by the turn of events. "But-"

"Yes?" Kairi questioned. Aqua started walking down to the end of the hallway, and Kairi followed behind her. They went through the same door Riku and Sora had gone through, but instead of going to the training room, she had led Kairi to a lounge of sorts. Kairi sat down on one of the cushions instinctively. The room was filled with puzzles and games, and she wondered if the Queen had grown up here, playing with her fellow Spider Riders between missions.

"Ven-" Aqua started, before changing her tone. "I do not let Ventus stray too far from the castle, but he still finds a way to actively rescue injured Spiders as well as people from the Invectids." Aqua explained to her. "He normally goes down to our hospitals to check on them. You can wait here for him if you wish, and see if there is a Spider there you think would work well with you." Aqua told her. Kairi nodded, a smile forming on her face. Aqua could see the enthusiastic expression Kairi held on her face. Finally, Kairi wasn't going to be left out, and she could prove herself just like her friends.

Kairi waited in the room, wondering where Ventus could be. She was getting anxious, and knew that Sora and Riku would figure out how to use all of their powers before she even got a chance. She decided to wander through the the halls, knocking on each door. Finally, one knock earned her an opened door. At first the room itself stuck out at her. The bed was pressed up against the window, the bookshelf crammed in between that and a desk that had a tiki mask on it. A plant hung down from a shelf close to the ceiling and the vines hung over a nightstand with a water jug on it. There was a crystal sphere in the room that had 3 cracks in it, but still shined brightly. There was so much junk in it, yet it was orderly, from the birdcage to the toy boat, everything seemed to have a place. The second thing she noticed, was the person inside the room. Ventus was in a tshirt and boxers, like he had just gotten up. Kairi didn't seem as embarrassed as Ventus, as she noticed he stared at her. His face brightened as he acknowledged her.

"Is something wrong?" Kairi asked him. She had been used to seeing Sora and Riku both in their pajamas since childhood, and didn't seem to understand that Ventus was not only embarrassed, but also dazzled by her.

"I-I'm sorry." He exclaimed. "It's just, I've never seen anyone like you before." Kairi giggled a bit, hearing a sweet tone in his voice.

"It's okay. I'm actually looking for you." Kairi said, rocking on her heels for a moment. "Queen Aqua said that you could take me to where some of the wounded Spiders are being treated. I'd like one of them to be my partner after they recover." Kairi told him. Ventus' face lit up.

"You're one of the Earthens from the outer world. I knew you would come on our side." He smiled again, and Kairi found it enduring. The boy was only a bit younger then them, she figured.

"When you're ready, we can go into the city together." Kairi gave him a small smile before she closed the door to allow him to get dressed.

Ventus' heart was racing fast as the door closed. What he had meant to say was that he had never seen anyone so _beautiful_ before. He was excited to meet the other two Spider Riders. It had been so long since he had trained with someone or went on any missions.

"Well it looks like someone's got a crush." The sound came out of his Manacle. It was Aurai, his battle Spider.

"I do not." Ventus protested to her. She laughed teasingly through the Manacle.

"Don't lie to me. Even I can see that she's pretty." His Spider boasted with an air of superiority. He swallowed, too embarrassed to say anything.

"I hope she finds the Battle Spider she's looking for." Ventus told Aurai.

"You can practice with her! I'm sure someone needs to show all of the new Spider Riders the ropes."

"That's too big of a job for me." Ventus sighed a little bit. He was the youngest of all the Spider Riders, and he felt like he was too much of a kid to do anything that important. Aurai encouraged him even still.

"You can do it. We're a team, so I'll help you." The Battle Spider put a smile on his face, and he nodded. He got changed into civilian clothes; a jacket, white on the right side and black on the left, a red collar and a grey vest with white line patterns on it under that. He had a black shirt under that layer as well, dressing warmly for the cold Arachna weather. His pants were shades of grey, black and white, and had an X-shaped strap across his chest. His Manacle's gem was black and white. He came back out to see Kairi waiting patiently. She gave him a small nod, before they both headed out back into the city.

Not too long after they had left, Aqua could see a bright light beaming into the sky as she looked out the window of Ventus' room. She smiled. That light could only mean one thing - that Kairi had found her partner.

4. To Protect What Matters

Ventus was out in the colosseum with Sora, Riku, and Kairi. He stood in front of them all, trying to make himself look tall. Ven's blonde hair seemed to shine as the sun started to 'set'. He took a deep breath. There was a deafening silence.

"This kid is supposed to be our teacher?" Arenite spoke out of turn, and Sora glared at the impolite Battle Spider. Ventus opened his mouth to speak, but nothing came out. He stuttered for a moment, before Kairi smiled at him to give support. He then got all of his energy back.

"I'm so glad to meet you all. I'm Ventus, but call me Ven." He smiled cheerfully, gaining his confidence back. "I already taught his to Kairi. Will you demonstrate for them?" He turned to her. She nodded, before raising her Manacle to the sky.

"Amphitrite, Spider out!" Kairi shouted. There was a small amount of light, before Amphitrite was outside of the Manacle. She was mostly pink, but was also blue and white.

"You can also say, Spider In, in order to put your Spider in Manacle space. Your Spiders can hang out in there and communicate with each other if they're close enough. It's a mystery to us as to how, but it's comfortable for them." Ventus explained, before he called out his own Spider, Aurai. Aurai was a white spider with black spots, almost similar to a ladybug. She giggled as she came out.

"The next thing I got to do was pick my weapon. When you put enough of your being into an attack, your Keyblade will transform into any weapon you will it to be. It's good if you decide on one weapon, because then it'll be a more natural transformation."

"What's your weapon, Ven?" Kairi asked curiously. She already had hers in mind.

He closed his eyes and winced almost painfully. He had the lamest transformation in existence, but no matter how much he tried he couldn't change it. He scratched his head self-consciously.

"I use magic of different types, the magic is infused in the weapon." He danced around the subject, and quickly Sora interrupted.

"This is just like one of our strategy games!"

"That's what I was thinking, actually. We need defense, offense, range, and a healer. If Ventus has magic he can heal right?" Kairi pointed out.

"You'll all learn how to use magic, but it's stronger in some people than others." Ventus mimicked Aqua, though the trio didn't realize it.

"I want to be ranged. What about you, Riku?"

Riku shrugged. He knew Sora would want to be on the offensive, fighting with brute strength. He wondered if he should claim it

first? He tried to look within himself. If the weapon was supposed to come from the heart, what did he want to use most?

Riku was a young boy on Destiny Island, and hung out with Sora on the beaches when they were young. They raced around as dusk started to fall, pretending to be superheros.

"Over here!" Sora called to Riku's father, who was rowing in from the main island. But Riku was distracted, and heard something coming from the Secret Place.

"Sora, you stay put okay?" Riku replied. Sora nodded to him, though he wondered where Riku was going. Riku had gone into the Secret Place with Sora before, trying to search for monsters, but he had never gotten all the way to the end without Sora getting scared. But right now he wasn't fearful of what was at the end of the tunnel. He saw a man, lying on the floor of the cave.

"Hey, are you okay? My name's Riku." He was shaking awake a brown haired stranger.

"My name's Terra." He was gasping for his breath. He seemed to be panting, almost like he was afraid or tired.

"Did you come from the outside world? Another world?" He said the last part more slowly. "Nobody lives out here, and I know everyone on the mainland." Riku said matter of factly.

"Smart kid."

"I heard about a kid once, who left. Is that you?" Riku questioned. He shook his head.

"Why do you want to know about the outside world?" He sat up, looking at him at his eye level.

"I want to _go_ to the outside world." Riku corrected. "So I can be strong. I bet the kid that left is strong. The strength I need is out there somewhere. You know, like, a knight, a hero's strength."

"Strength, for what?"

"To protect the things that matter, you know, like my friends." Riku blinked with a small smile on his face. Terra nodded, having an endearing smile.

"I want to help you, to be a hero." He told him. He summoned his Keyblade. "In your hand, take this Key. So long as you have the makings, then through this simple act of taking, its wielder you shall one day be. And you will find me, friendâ€”no ocean will contain you then. No more borders around, or below, or above, so long as you champion the ones you love."

Riku grasped the handle, and a small light appeared in his fingertips. When Riku looked up, he saw the door. The door to the inner world. He watched the man's Keyblade disappear, and a dark hole appeared under him. "Keep this a secret, okay? Till we see each other again."

"Hey, what's wrong?!" Riku asked in a panic.

"Don't worry about me. I need to go, and help my friends." Riku remembered watching him wide eyed, as he snapped back into reality.

"I want a shield." Riku announced. "To protect, the things I care about." Riku stepped forward, and Sora had a soft smile on his face.

"Rikuâ€¦" His voice trialed off. Sora put his hand on Riku's shoulder. "Stop being so serious, come on." Sora put his hands behind his head.

"Alright! Riku, why don't you fight us first?" Ventus told him. "That way, you guys will be ready for Aqua tomorrow."

Riku gave a brief nod.

"Are you ready, Ã‰benos?" Riku asked him as he stood on his back.

"Your efforts are valiant and I am proud to be your partner." Ã‰benos told Riku. Arenite sneered at his brother.

"On my count: 1, 2, 3!" Kairi shouted to both of them, and quickly they were off. Riku and Ã‰benos wasted no time going into hand to hand combat with Ventus and Aurai. When they were close enough, both Ã‰benos flew into the air with Riku. Riku took his blade with both hands, and tried to come crashing down on Ventus'. Ventus blocked the attack easily. Riku wasn't perfect in practice, but none of them would be. Riku recovered, and Ã‰benos only moved when Riku was moving past him. Aurai and Ventus were so intertwined that all of their actions seemed to be as one. Ventus held his blade backwards, with Riku thought he may be able to use to his advantage. He blocked awkwardly, and so if Riku could try and hit him in a weaker spot, he could disarm him. When Ventus came up to block another attack, Riku quickly hit his other arm, which wasn't holding his Keyblade. Ventus and Aurai both jumped backwards.

"Try making your shield!" Ventus suggested, having enough of Riku's heavy blows. Ventus waited, before unleashing his own attack. Marbles covered the ground in front of them, all in different colours for different spells.

"Ã‰benos! Use your web to tie a rope to me." Riku told him. Without any explanation, Ã‰benos did so. As Ã‰benos flew over the sky, in order to protect him and his spider from the bombs of magic, he created a blue, shimmering shield and held it under them. Riku was almost using it was a waterboard, flying through the air on top of it. Riku used it to get close to Ventus again, who the shield was promptly thrown at. It barely missed Ventus' face. Ventus panted, but Sora cheered from the sidelines.

"Riku! You were a bit shaky at first but as you kept going you got to be awesome!" Sora gave him a punch on the shoulder when Riku came back to the sidelines of the colosseum.

"Kairi, what about you go next?" Ventus asked her. He didn't want to undermine her, but if Riku was the defense and he had these brutal

attacks, he didn't think he could take Sora being offensive.

"I've been doing my best in order to get my Battle Partner, and my Keyblade. Don't expect me to hold back!" Kairi shouted to him as she got onto her battle spider. It seemed like almost instantly Kairi and her Spider were synced, and though his assisted her, it also meant that Amphitrite was brought into Kairi's mistakes. Ventus could tell, but it was understandable.

Kairi was getting ready to strike some blows on Ventus, when she could feel something bubbling up inside of her.

"Do it again, Kairi!" A 10 year old Sora, 11 year old Riku, and 10 year old Kairi had used the zipline to stand on a platform. Kairi had a makeshift bow and arrow, using some materials they had found on the Island. She had been trying to hit the wooden star that stood on a piece of the cliff.

"Sora, you're distracting her!" Riku said defensively. All three of them on the tiny platform was uncomfortable, and she didn't have enough arm room to shoot properly.

"I'm not distracting her, she just can't do it!" Sora crossed his arms at Riku, giving him a glare. Kairi narrowed her eyes at him. She knew she could do it, she did it before. She readied her arrow, and suddenly, her arm drew it back, knocking Sora. As he fell, Kairi shot the arrow, and it hit in the middle of the star. Kairi jumped off the platform and joined him in the sand.

"I told you I could do it." She crossed her arms in triumph, her face close to his as she stuck her tongue out. Sora grimaced as he rubbed his head.

"Well you didn't need to push me." He muttered to himself.

"Come on Sora, can't you take it?" Riku teased him. Sora crossed his arms, still on the ground, as Kairi stood up straight, leaning on the post that held up the platform.

"If you guys are going to be superheros someday, I need to be able to fight with something too. That's why I made this."

"You'll just be in the way, you're like a Princess, not an- Ow!" Sora shouted as Riku hit him on the shoulder.

"She can be a Princess _and _a Hero. Don't listen to him, we'll make a great team." Riku winked at her knowingly, and Kairi grinned back at him.

"Come on, let's go find the others." Kairi told them. The children laughed, as children often did, and Kairi took her bow with her as they played together.

Something seemed to burn in Kairi's eyes now.

"I'll show you what a '_Princess' _is really capable of, Sora!" A light shone in her hand, only for a moment to reveal a bow. Her Keyblade seemed to turn into it, while the arrow was metal, and a blue and electric purple. It seemed to have light protruding from it. She was able to shoot the arrows with ease, but Ventus was able to

avoid them. He used his Marble attack again, and then flew forward to strike a blow. Kairi, who was quick on her feet, had a bright idea. As Ventus flew over the marbles, she shot at them, causing Ventus to be engulfed in a fiery explosion.

Ventus flew into the air, not expecting all of his marbles to go off at once. It was his fault completely, as he put them too close together and should have expected it. He felt himself fall on the ground. Aurai was nudging him with her head.

"I don't think I can do another fight." Ventus struggled to get up, using his Keyblade as support. He hadn't actually fought in battle against the Invectids or anyone other than Aqua.

"That's fine. I want to fight against Sora." Riku announced teasingly.

"We're so toast." Arenite told Sora as he got onto his back.

"We'll be fine. I can take some hits." Sora told his partner.

Ventus watched from the sidelines of the colosseum. Sora was offensive, so he would specialize in hand to hand combat. Riku wasn't too bad at that, Ventus knew this from previous experience. Sora took a battle stance, before both Spiders raced to each other. Riku struck the first blow, but Sora tried to block using Ventus' technique.

"Thunder!" Riku shouted, pointing his Keyblade to Sora's body. An electric spark went out to hit him, and Arenite jumped to the side. Riku and Ã‰benos jumped backwards, wanting to get distance between the two spiders. Sora was doubting in himself, if he could really win this or not.

"You're on, Riku!" Sora, now 14, had challenged Riku to a battle. They did this to settle arguments, but this time it was more than that. It was sharing a Paopu fruit with Kairi. Riku and Sora both had toy wooden swords, and liked to fight on a small circular piece of land that was connected to the island by the bridge. It had many Paopu trees on it, and Kairi sat on one that curved over the water. She wasn't sure what they were disputing over, but she had to make sure they both fought fair.

Riku and Sora engaged in a fierce duel, Sora blocking and jumping to the side to avoid Riku's attacks.

"Just give up already, Sora!" Riku teased him. Sora was on the ground, trying to get back up as he used his sword as support.

"No way, Riku! Remember what your dad says! 'Never give up', and then he'd always jump up and say 'Arachna Power!'. I won't let you beat me!" Sora stood up determined, and used both his hands to steady his sword in order to get a better hit on Riku. Riku shrugged.

"Alright then." But Riku had no mercy. Sora knew he didn't want to hurt his friend badly, but he wanted to see how far Sora would really go. They were kids after all, and that's what they did. Sora though, was relentless. The battle went on for what felt like hours but could only be half of that time, and eventually, Riku was wearing out. Sora felt like he would drop any moment, but he knew he had done the same

to Riku. They ran towards each other, hitting their swords for one last time.

Both swords broke, and the two boys fell into each other. Kairi started to laugh quietly to herself, before everyone equally broke into laughter. Sora and Riku quickly rolled off each other and lied down on the sand, looking at the sky.

"Never give up, Riku." Sora said before closing his eyes, and drifting into a nap.

"We can beat Riku!" Sora shouted to Arenite. "We just need to never give up." Arenite laughed but did want to prove that he could be as great as his brother. Sora and Arenite both flew into the air, and Sora jumped from his Spider, holding his blade to strike Riku. Riku and Ã‰benos flew back, but Sora was still on Ã‰benos. He didn't know how to catch Riku off guard, and so, Sora repeatedly started hitting against Riku's block from all different angles. Riku stood his ground, but the more Sora hit him the more sore his arms became. Ã‰benos used his web to grab Sora's arm, and pull Sora down to the ground as the Spider shook his head. Riku nearly fell off Ã‰benos, but watched as Sora got back on Arenite. Sora took thrusted his arm to the side, his Keyblade appearing once again. "Arenite, fly over Riku."

"Over Riku?" Arenite scoffed. But Sora pressed on. Arenite did as Sora commanded, though he made it known in his laughter that he thought it was a stupid idea. Riku struck Arenite's undercarriage, but Sora in that moment had the advantage. In that moment, he pushed Riku with his legs, before tackling him to the ground.

Riku felt his head hit the sand. It reminded him of back when they were on the island again. Sora was on top of him, just like when they were kids. They both started laughing, and they both stood up.

"There can be no winners here, you're both of equal power." A voice from behind the kids spoke. It was Aqua in all of her radiance.

"We're ready for you, your majesty!" Sora told her as they walked towards her. She shook her head.

"You are indeed, but you won't be fighting me." Everyone's face dropped. She put her hand up to stop any outbursts. "I need you to go on a very important mission." Aqua's face looked grim. "The village of Fragrant Blooms is in danger. Organization 13 has decided to strike, and they could ruin our precious flowers."

"Well then we need to go help them." Kairi clenched her fists.

"Are you ready, Arenite?"

"I'm always ready to kick some bug. Let's ride." Arenite replied. Sora, Kairi, and Riku all got onto their battle spiders.

"I'm going too!" Ventus announced proudly.

"No, Ven, it's too dangerous. Go wait in your room." Aqua glared at him, grabbing him by the arm as he walked forward. Ventus sighed in

defeat, but Sora spoke up.

"Your majesty, we need to have some sort of a guide." Sora winked at him. He smiled. Aqua put her fingers to her temples, and then groaned.

"You're going to bring back Ven in one piece." Her stare could kill them if they looked directly at it.

"You can count on us." Riku tried to smile at Aqua, still captured with her. As they headed out, Aqua stood in the colosseum.

"Good luck to youâ€¦" She whispered to herself, watching them disappear past the castle walls.

5. Fragrant Blooms: Kairi's Nightmare

Kairi always had a fondness for flowers. Her Keyblade was decorated with them, forged with the blade, so when they came across the fields upon fields of flowers, they put their spiders inside of Manacle Space. They walked along the paths the cultivators would have walked, if they were there. Kairi looked at the beautiful, red roses that captured her attention. She knelt down in the patch.

Sora, with his hands impatiently behind his head, gave a look to Riku.

"Why are we stopping here again when there are people to save? Come on Riku." Sora argued. But Riku simply gestured over to Kairi, and Ventus who knelt beside her. Ven's face was slightly red, and both him and Kairi had smiles on their faces. Sora's face turned red, and he glared. "That kid." He growled to Riku. Riku laughed him off as Kairi and Ventus waved to them from their patch of flowers. They regrouped on a bridge which connected the two fields.

"Something doesn't seem right here." Ventus crossed his arms, obviously puzzled. "Cultivating flowers takes a lot of work, but there's no one here."

"Well then maybe we should go into the town." Sora suggested under his breath. Kairi rolled her eyes.

"Come on, let's go." She dragged Sora by the arm, leading the way to go into the town. It was absolutely deserted. "Let's split up and try to see if anyone are in these houses." Kairi suggested. The group nodded, and they each looked inside some of the huts the villagers had. Kairi looked through windows and opened doors, but found no one.

"I've got a bad feeling about this." Ventus looked down the well in the middle of the town, and also in one of the houses near by it. He was excited to actually be going on a mission, and that Aqua seemed to be treating him like an adult. Sora and Riku walked together, but shook their heads.

"Do you think they were captured by Organization 13?" Sora asked Riku.

"What if they were turned into Invectid Heartless? Or worseâ€¦

Nobodies?" Ventus had a fearful tone in his voice. There was one final house they hadn't looked into yet. Sora rushed forward, kicking the door open.

"Sora!" Kairi yelled as he broke down the door.

Sora looked inside. There was a young girl, around their age, huddled up in the corner of the room. She was wearing a simple white dress, and had long, blonde hair. Her eyes were red from crying, and her cheeks pink. Sora blinked at her. Ventus walked past him. The girl was hugging a sketchbook and pencil.

"Hey, it's okay." Ventus reached his hand out to the girl. "It's okay to be frightened, but we're Spider Riders." She took it and he helped her up.

"Spiderâ€¦ Riders?" The girl questioned.

"My name is Ventus, but call me Ven, okay?" He told her. The girl nodded.

"My name is NaminÃ©. Thank you, Ven." She wiped the tears from her eyes.

"What happened here?" Riku asked her.

"Theyâ€¦ were all taken." NaminÃ© spoke with a quiet, but shaky tone.

"I knew it!" Sora exclaimed. "Tell us where!" Sora's face fell as he had just made the girl even more upset. Kairi pushed him aside. "Hey-"

"It's okay, NaminÃ©." Kairi took one of her hands. "Do you know where they might be?"

"Probably in the cave, at the north end of the village." NaminÃ© told her, a pleading look in her eye. Kairi nodded.

"Come with us, we'll protect you, okay?" Kairi gave her a small smile, and NaminÃ© followed the group as they filed out of the house. Ventus put an arm around NaminÃ©, trying to support her weight as she walked. "The Invectids probably want the flower of darkness."

"Flower of darkness?"

"It can't grow in the light, any light will destroy it."

"But why would they-" Kairi was cut off by an impatient Sora.

"Forget the frickin' flowers!" Sora groaned. "We got to save the people right away." He ran headfirst into the cave.

"Sora!" Kairi shouted, running after him. Riku and Ventus ran after him, but NaminÃ© stayed where she was. When Ventus turned around to see why she hadn't followed, she mouthed something to him.

Got you.

Before Ventus could even give out an exclamation, NaminÃ© was drawing in her sketchbook. She waved her hand once it was complete. She used her pen to draw an imaginary 'X'.

"NaminÃ©!" Ventus shouted, trying to run back to her, but it was no use. An invisible wall blocked them. When Ventus turned around, the walls of the cave were no longer dark, but all in white. It was like a stretch of hallway, and a cave no longer. At the end of the hallway, there was a flower on a pedestal.

"She tricked us!"

"No, there must be a mistake. Ven, are you sure?"

"I know what I saw happen!" Ven retorted to Kairi. Both of them sighed heavily. They looked at the flower at the end of the hallway.

"This must have been what the Invectids were after." Kairi and Ven both looked at the flower.

"Guys, can get forget about the flowers?! We're missing the townspeople, not even to mention we don't have a way out of here." But just as Sora spoke, Kairi and Ven both fell.

"Kairi!" Sora shouted, running over to her and kneeling over. "What happened to her?!"

"I should think it's obvious." Riku looked behind him to see an Invectid in a black coat. One of the members of Organization 13. "This town isn't the town you were meant to save at all. The people are in no danger, but you are." You could hear the smile in his voice as he walked towards Sora and Riku. "This is all an illusion." He twirled his fingers in the air, and flower petals seem to come out of his fingertips.

"You better help Kairi, or else you're going to pay!" Sora clenched his fist, and his Keyblade came into his hand. He tried to fight the figure, but with every blow, they just vanished and reappeared into falling petals. The figure then took the flower into his hands, before blowing the dust on both Sora and Riku.

"I can't wait to see, if you can travel through your deepest nightmares and survive."

Riku reached out to the figure before his eyes closed, and he fell to sleep.

SRKH SRKH SRKH SRKH SRKH SRKH SRKH SRKH SRKH SRKH SRKH SRKH

When Kairi woke up, she was in a ball under a table. She was in a nearly lightless room, only to be lit up by her Manacle. She found herself in a familiar library. Her whole life was on the island, at least, that's what she told Sora. But she had lied. She had memories of her past in fragments, and this was one of them. Hiding under the table of the library, as the castle was eaten by darkness. From there, she found herself on Destiny Island. She could feel the turmoil here as she stood up. Why was she back here in this memory, this nightmare? She didn't know. All she knew was now she had the

power to save this place, even if it just saved the nightmare. She stood up strong, she knew what was coming. The first slam of the doors opening wide. Through winding bookcases the Invectid Heartless found their way to her.

"Arachna Power!" She shouted to the sky as she armoured herself, Keyblade in hand. She knew she would have the advantage if she headed to the top of the stairs, being able to shoot them down with her bow and arrow. She ran to the top of the staircase, and watched as the black creatures came towards her. She focused hard on making her bow and arrow appear, wanting to save this place. The first heartless jumped on her in her focus, and she tossed it back, hitting it with the tip of her weapon. It broke through a window. She thought about it harder. This was her home, just as much as the island. She needed to protect it. She felt her arm pull back on an invisible draw, and suddenly her bow and arrow weapon came into focus. She was about to put a spell on it, but she realized that she would trap herself in a fiery hell if she used a fire spell on it. She would just have to use the light. As the heartless came up the stairs, Kairi shot them one by one. Sometimes they would sink into the ground, and she had to try again, but sometimes she was able to destroy them in one shot. They clawed when they got close to her, but she would kick at them or hit them with the bow, sending them back. She thought they had stopped coming, but she was wrong. Instead they came in greater numbers. She couldn't stay here. She couldn't take so many by herself, and she couldn't get her Spider to help her in here. She ran up the stairs. She remembered there being a secret passage, but where was it? She looked through the books, remembering that in order for the door to show they all needed to be in the right place. But there was no time to gather them all. She turned to where she thought she may remember the entrance.

"Fire!" A fireball shot out of her Keyblade and immediately set the wall on fire. She knew the wall was thin, and this would weaken it. She rammed herself into it. Even in her armour, she could feel a pain going through her shoulder. She ran through the passage, trying to get to another part of the castle. There were heartless everywhere. She couldn't go back to the horde behind her - she would have to lose them. Purebloods were in her way, and she swung at them with full force as she ran across the bridge, going through another door and arriving on a platform. There was a lift that could take her to the higher part of the castle. She waited for it, and when she turned to see the heartless on her tail, she realized it was rising without her. She jumped up into the air and grabbed the edge of the platform. Now she remembered this part of her memory, she had fallen into the abyss under the castle, and out into "space". She tried to keep her grip, but she felt herself fall. She reached up for a hand in front of her. She swore it was Sora's, but as she tried to keep ahold of it, she closed her eyes, ready for the impact of falling out of the world. But she found herself on a floor, her illusion breaking.

She saw someone in front of her in a black coat, clapping.

"Bravo Kairi, I didn't think you were smart enough to find your way out of your little nightmare. But it looks like you have. Congratulations." It was a female voice, but not NaminÃ©. Kairi was lying on the floor, still in her armour. She was gasping for breath. "Oh what, was that too hard for you, Princess?" The women cackled. Kairi stood up, using her Keyblade as support.

"You, you're one of the Organization 13. Like Demyx."

"I never quite liked him. He was always so _annoying_." She spoke a-matter-of-factly. "You all did us a favour."

"How can you say that about your teammate!?" Kairi barked at the girl. She laughed at Kairi again.

"Now I see why Ventus likes you so much. You have something about you." The woman circled her, putting her hand on her shoulder. Kairi backed up, hearing that laughter again. The woman took off her hood to reveal a bee-like Invectid with blonde "hair". Her wings were revealed, as there were holes at the back of her coat. She showed them to Kairi as she grinned. "I'm Larxene. I hope you're enjoying your stay at the castle. I hope that it's reminded you of all of your lies. What would Sora say if after all these years you hid from him your biggest secret?"

Kairi's mouth was agape as Larxene spoke.

"You're just Invectid scum! Sora will understand. You won't succeed in ripping us apart. Now let me past that door. I completed your test, didn't I?" She readied her Keyblade as she stared down Larxene. Larxene simply laughed at here.

"Ah, ah, ah, not so fast. You're forgetting something Kairi, or at least, maybe you're pretending not to remember. You can lie to Sora, but can you really lie to yourself?'

"Stop trying to mess with me. That's all I remember. There's nothing else."

"You're forgetting one of the most important things from your stay at Radiant Gardens. When that poor girl hears for you forgot her completely, it'll just break her heart." Larxene mocked a dramatic sigh and fake tears. "I suppose I may have to jog your memory, by beating it back into the forefront of your mind, then you'll remember for sure!" Larxene then flew forwards towards Kairi, making her Keyblade go flying as Larxene hit her arm, before kicking her, making her backwards. Then, from within a pocket in Kairi's clothes, her good luck charm fell on the floor. Larxene picked it up, and Kairi reached for it. She had wanted to give it to Sora.

"Well, well, well." Larxene picked it up. "This wasn't for Sora, was it? Think Kairi, how could he accept it after you've been so dishonest, such a horrible friend?!" She spoke with a dramatic sadness, mocking Kairi. Kairi moved to get up again."You're so heartless, I can't believe you!"

"You're the one with no heart, Invectid Nobody!" Kairi grabbed her Keyblade and pointed it at Larxene.

"Sora would thank me for smashing this worthless piece of junk!" Larxene started crushing it in her hands.

"Stop!" Kairi charged towards her, hitting her arm with the Keyblade.

"Finally, the fight I wanted." And into Larxene's hands were knives like stingers, and that's when Kairi realized she was being used. She

growled under her breath as Larxene charged at her with lightning charged knives. Kairi jumped backwards, using her Keyblade to block one of them.

"Amphitrite! Spider out!" Kairi shouted. Her spider was already armoured. There was more than enough space for a fight inside of the room of the Castle. She sneered at Larxene. They both jumped backwards. Larxene simply laughed at Kairi's attempted to get higher ground on her Spider, and used her wings to fly to the ceiling, throwing her knives at Kairi. One nearly missed her face as Amphitrite used her webs to catch it. That didn't stop Larxene from throwing another one across, skinning her face.

Kairi felt an electric shock course through her veins as Larxene's knives cut her flesh. She screamed in pain, but pushed forward as Larxene wouldn't expect her to attack now. She hit Larxene's chest now that she was close to her. Larxene flew backwards at the impact, her wings stopping her from colliding with the wall. Stunned, Kairi now focused on creating a her bow and arrow. If she didn't do this, Sora would find out everything. She couldn't let him find out from anyone else that she was from The Inner World. She didn't want him to hate her. She wanted to believe he wouldn't, but Larxene's words frightened her.

Kairi created the bow and arrow, with the same light like she had used before. She started shooting at Larxene. The impact made her fly backwards as the light hit her, but the elasticity of the web pulled her back forward, Kairi being able to get another hit on her. This time the web snapped, and Larxene, as she flew towards the wall opened a portal of darkness. She flew through it, disappearing from Kairi's view.

"You're better than I thought. I'm glad I tested you." She heard her taunting voice from beyond on the world.

Kairi screamed loudly in pain as well as anger. Hot tears mixed with the blood on her face as she cried. She looked down to the ground, her tears hitting the floor.

"Kairi!" From behind her, she heard Sora call her. She brought her head back up, the blood and water flying off her face as she turned to him. His mouth was wide open as he ran towards her. He used the sleeve of his shirt to wipe the blood off of her face.
>"That's not going to be an easy stain for you to get out." Kairi tried to joke with Sora, but he was now enraged.<p>

"Who did this?! What did they look like? Did they have petals around them?" Sora asked her. Kairi shook her head.

"I'm fine. It's just a cut." She felt it, looking at the blood on her fingers. "Come on, we need to go find Riku. He may be hurt." Kairi suggested. She didn't want Sora to ask anymore questions right now. They walked down the highwall, both Battle Spiders now in their Manacles.

"That guy put us all to sleep, and he said we could go through our deepest nightmares, but nothing happened to me." Sora said with his hands behind his head as they walked.

"Wait, you didn't have a nightmare?" Kairi questioned.

"No, did you?" Sora looked at her curiously. Kairi nodded.

"I had a nightmare, but I found my way out of it. It was like an illusion."

"He said this town, this castle, everything here was an illusion." Sora thought of the man in the black coat with clear irritation. Kairi looked up at the ceiling, as if expecting someone to pop out from it. "NaminÃ©, why did she do this?"

6. Ventus' and Riku's Nightmare

Ventus was on a barren land. He had been here before in nightmares. He had protested to Aqua that this was not a nightmare, but in fact, a vision. A vision of the future, but Aqua said that it was ridiculous. He knew how it would start. Xehanort, his uncle, crushing in his skull as he struggled to get out of his grasp. He was frozen in frost, and as the ice made his head pound. That was his worst fear, since he had been having this nightmare. Being paralyzed in the ice, unable to save Terra and Aqua from Vanitas. He had dreamed of Vanitas killing him, even though they were brothers. The thought had been ridiculous. Why did he dream of his family like this? He felt guilty every time, and as Uncle Xehanort was dropping him off of the cliff, he shut his eyes. He tried to tell himself that it was impossible this would ever happen, that Terra and Aqua would never be put in any danger because of his Uncle, because of anyone but the Invectids.

"Terra! Aqua!" He yelled throughout the white room. Ventus awoke in a state of confusion and panic. All of the rooms looked the same. It was an endless abyss of despair which led him through this castle. That's what he felt. He needed to find the others fast. He barely took a step into the next hallway, when an Invectid with long blonde 'hair' appeared. The coat covered most of their body, but it was obvious that they were a grasshopper type invectid.

"I take it you're Ventus." The invectid chuckled a-matter-a-factly.

"You're with Organization 13!" Ventus shouted at him.

"Very high up, in fact." They smiled, correcting him.

"Like I care about that!" He retorted, summoning his Keyblade.

"So it's a fight you want? Very good, Ventus. I've always wanted to gather your data for my experiments. And this would be the best way." The invectid had a condescending laughter as he summoned his weapon, a shield. Ventus raised his hand up into the air.

"Aurai, Spider Out!" The black and white spider immediately came to Ventus' aid. Ventus had already used enough power in his nightmare to summon his special weapon. He put the marbles out onto the floor, all of them of different elements.

"How very interesting." His opponent teased. To Ventus' surprised, he had willing stepped on one of the explosives. It sent out an ice spell, but the attack seemed to have no effect on the Invectid. It

was absorbed into his shield. As Ventus went forward to attack, his enemy trapped him in a ball of ice. Ventus wished he could scream. Ice. Part of his nightmare. Is that why they sent him? When Ventus was released from the Ice, he jumped backwards onto Aurai.

"I can't do this anymore, Aurai." Ventus shook, cold from the ice.

"The nightmares have given you post-traumatic stress. What an exciting revelation. This little encounter, as short as it has been had provided me with invaluable data about the nature of your heart. Pure. I must go and report my findings." The Grasshoper smiled at Ventus. "Many thanks, Ventus. I do hope we meet again, to make sure my research is consistent." The Organization 13 member disappeared. Ventus screamed, alone in the room. He thrashed his Keyblade at the air in an intense anger.

"Ven!" Kairi was running in behind him, putting her arms around him to stop him from attacking further. He tossed Kairi off for a moment, but she did this again. Sora could have sworn he heard a noise like a tinkle of light as Ventus calmed down. Ventus started breathing normally again, and Kairi let go.

"I'm sorry. Did I hurt you?" Ventus asked, his voice of full and deep concern. Kairi shook her head. His face changed as he saw her cut was still bleeding. He touched her cheek carefully with his fingers. "Cure." Sora watched as the blood stopped flowing, though the cut was still a deep gash. "This should hold for now."

"Thank you, Ventus." Kairi smiled at him. Sora crossed his arms.

"A Grasshopper came, and used my nightmare to disable my fighting. They know our weaknesses because of what we all dreamed!" Ventus exclaimed. Kairi seemed to start shaking at the thought.

"Come on, we have to find Riku!" Sora suggested to both of them. Both Kairi and Ventus nodded, though they looked uneasy. Sora led the way, and Ventus whispered to Kairi.

"Why isn't he worried about anything?" Ventus asked her.

"He didn't have a nightmare." She whispered back. "Which means they don't know his weakness."

Ventus thought about what Kairi had said. If Sora didn't have a nightmare, did that mean he wasn't afraid of anything? The thought was interesting for sure, and inspiring. It was so cool to be near someone with no fears at all. But Kairi didn't think so. Kairi thought that not be afraid of anything made Sora reckless and would be his downfall.

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When Riku thought that he awoke, he saw the Island being destroyed. His home. He summoned his Keyblade and armour as he saw strange creatures attacking, whom he could only assume were Invectid Heartless. He felt a feeling in his heart, to go to the Secret Place. Was this a vision of what was to come? Was this Organization 13's plan? To come out of the Inner World and destroy the peaceful worlds

on the outside? As Riku went into the Secret Place he saw Terra surrounded by Darkness, and for a moment an idea come to his mind: back then when they had first met, was Terra getting killed by the Darkness, or was he embracing it? He heard Terra's voice in his mind, calling him a failure. He turned from Terra to see a version of himself in front of him, an Invectid version of himself. Riku, in this lucid dream recognised that he was afraid of himself, and of the power Terra had given him. He knew that in the world there was a balance of good and evil, but he always had feared tipping into the evil side.

He lashed out at his impostor, and he was suddenly brought back out of the illusion. He was in the castle again. He was revealed. But the Invectid impostor, the bug that he couldn't identify, himself, still remained.

"Are you looking for a fight?" Riku pointed his Keyblade at The Riku Replica.

"You aren't as tough as you look, Riku." The Riku Replica replied dramatically. "I'm your worst nightmare. What would your friends, what would Queen Aqua say about that? You're supposed to be a leader, a commander, but yet you can't even lead the way you are. How you're scared of everything." The RIku Replica came towards him, pushing him backwards.

"Everyone is afraid of something. And my fear makes me think before I act. It makes me concerned for the well-being of others. Yes, I may be scared, but everyone is scared. Especially of the dark." Riku pointed his Keyblade towards The Riku Replica. "But that doesn't mean we run from it! You're just an empty shell, a Nobody with no heart. That's why you're not afraid."

"I may not have a heart, but that makes it easier to control the Darkness. Which means me stronger then you will ever be!" The Riku Replica shouted back at him. He summoned the same weapon as Riku, but it was evident from the beginning they would fight differently.

"Riku, you must call me out of your Manacle!" Ã‰benos shouted to him from inside Manacle space. Riku replied to him.

"I need to prove that I can beat him with my own strength." Riku spoke impulsively.

"A Spider Rider is nothing without his Spider. We work as a team, Riku. Is it not weakness that you fight alongside your comrades, but it is a sign of strength. Is it the 'heart' you just spoke about. Without a heart you cannot have friendships, and this thing in front of you has no heart to speak of!" Ã‰benos shouted to Riku.

This touched Riku's heart and cleared his mind. He couldn't act on emotions alone. He must be in touch with his Battle Spider. They were partnered for life now. He called Ã‰benos out from the Manacle. Both of them armoured, Riku pointed the Keyblade at The Riku Replica. The Riku Replica jumped, missing Riku's first swing at him, before The Riku Replica created balls of darkness. He was controlling them with the Keyblade, making them fly in all directions. Ã‰benos used his webs to destroy some of the balls of darkness. Riku blocked above him, but two of the other attacks wounded his wrist. Riku focused on

creating the shield that he had made in training previously. He pictured many shields, protecting him from all angles that he could move around. He was unaware that this was far too much energy for him to put into an attack. Regardless the blue, gold and silver shields shone brightly, and as The Riku Replica shot larger attacks at him, he moved the shields to block, this time only one attack hitting him. Now that The Riku Replica was at a disadvantage, Riku and Ã‰benos jumped forward, the shields disappearing. Riku was starting to feel dizzy, but he had to land a hit on his enemy. He hit the Riku Replica, in his left arm, but he brought his arm back up to block a second attempt. They both clashed their Keyblades, blocking each other's attacks in intense combat. Ã‰benos used his web to decorate the walls. At first, Riku didn't know what his partner was doing. But something hit him. Riku jumped to one of the corners of the room, where Ã‰benos had put the elastic web. With his enemy confused, Riku propelled himself off the corner of the wall, ramming himself into The Riku Replica. A trick he had learned from Sora in training. Now with his opponent being on the ground, Riku used his Keyblade to stab him in his arm. He hallowed, and Riku got off of him.

A figure came out of a dark portal just as Riku jumped backwards onto his Battle Spider. He picked up The Riku Replica with brute strength, and tossed him through it.

"Vexen's genius has proven to be idiocy. Congratulations." The deep voice spoke to him. Riku readied his weapon at the stranger. "No matter, we do not need your nightmares. I will simply become yours, in the moments before you perish." Riku knew that he couldn't last another fight. Not against someone like this.

"You are Organization 13 scum. I have no time for your games! Let's get this fight over with." Riku said, his voice breathless as he spoke to the hooded stranger.

They removed their hood from their face. The giant battle horned Beetle, with short brown 'hair' and a large, heavy, Axe Sword held their weapon proudly for Riku to see.

"I am not afraid of you, Spider Rider. I, Lexaeus, will not yield to the frail heart of an infantile coward and his pathetic Battle Spider." There was a red aura around him as he 'charged' up an attack. He jumped forward towards Riku, and as he crashed back from the ground, a black circle of darkness came around him. Riku watched as rocks protruded from the ground, tossing Ã‰benos and him from each other. Riku felt the rock hits his back, and then watched as Lexaeus slammed into him with his Axe Sword. Riku could feel his wrist go limp as he tried to defend himself with the Keyblade. He then picked up Riku by the collar, similar to how he did to the Riku Replica. Lexaeus slammed him against the wall. He summoned an avalanche, crushing Riku under pile of rocks. Riku put his arm out to summon the Keyblade to his aid again, using it to clear the rocks in front of him. He didn't know how much longer he could go on.

"Riku! Don't give up!" He heard a voice inside of his mind. Queen Aqua's. Was he hallucinating? Had he lost his mind in between the blows? Even still, the thought of Queen Aqua cheering him on made him able to stand again.

"Why do you not falter?" Lexaeus shouted at him as he swung at Riku. Suddenly, Ã‰benos shot in front of him, pushing the large bug against

the walls of the castle, which shook. Ã‰benos was now at the brunt of the blows, as Riku tried to breath.

"Don't just stand there, Riku!" Ã‰benos yelled to him in a pain-filled tone. Riku nodded. He had to use the chance that Ã‰benos was giving him. He ran forward, hitting Lexaeus' arm to try and get him to drop his weapon. As Lexaeus swung upwards to hit Riku, Riku was able to summon the shield. Riku felt something bubble up inside him, hatred, anger, fear, and though he tried to hold it back, he could not.

Was this why they had sent these tests? So he could give in to the darkness inside of him? Riku didn't want to kill him. But he saw no other choice. Ã‰benos was in pain, and they would both surely die here. As Lexaeus moved forward to finish off his Battle Spider, Riku sprung forward as well. Lexaeus was too caught up in the heat of the battle between Invectid and Spider to see that from behind, Riku rushed forward and stabbed him with the point of his Keyblade. Was it worth it? To take a life? But then he remembered, that Nobodies weren't people at all. They had no hearts. That is how he tried to justify it to himself. He was covered in the blood of an Invectid, and he watched as Lexaeus disappeared, faded away just like Demyx. How could Riku face his friends this way? After carrying out such a callous act? He may have spoken to Ã‰benos, relying a similar message, but before his Battle Spider could speak to Riku, both of them fell unconscious. Lexaeus was right: He became Riku's worse Nightmare.

7. Vexen and Larxene

Sora, Ventus, and Kairi felt like they were walking for hours through an endless cave. They passed through what felt like a million doors, until they found themselves outside. They were in the field of flowers that they had seen on the way to the village.

"We'reâ€¦ back here?" Sora looked at his friends curiously.

"No, it has to be a trick. We're still inside for sure. They wouldn't just let us go." Ventus told Sora, his voice obviously irritated.

"Correct. Very good, Ventus." Ventus knew that voice, as a familiar Grasshopper appeared in front of the three.

"You! You're the bug who was bullying Ven!" Kairi shouted, immediately jumping in front of Sora and Ventus, ready to charge at the Organization member.

"Kairi, what a surprise. Larxene mentioned something about you in her mindless twittering." The Grasshopper gave Kairi a knowing smile that made her sick.

"You know who we all are, why don't you return the courtesy?" Kairi retorted, cutting him Sora before he could ask about her encounter with Larxene.

"I am Organization 13's 4th member, Vexen. The highest member who has been sent to eliminate you." Vexen gave another grin to the Spider Riders. "But I have a particular interest in Ventus and Kairi." He

stepped forward, but Kairi swung at him. He jumped backwards.

"You will not lay a finger on me or Ventus." She readied her weapon at him. He raised an eyebrow.

"Is that so?" Vexen summoned his shield, and Ventus started shuddering at the thought of being trapped in ice again.

"Eliminate us?" Sora's mouth fell in horror. "Riku! Where's Riku? What have you done with him!?" Sora yelled, running forward at Vexen and attacking him as he used his shield to block the attack.

"Riku's fate is to fall into darkness! And it will be your fate as well." Vexen announced to them. Kairi summoned her Spider as Ventus raced forward to help Sora, but he watched in terror as Vexen used his shield to freeze Sora in a block of ice. "Come any closer Ventus, and you will have the same fate as Sora." This made Ventus halt in his tracks, but Kairi didn't hesitate. Watching Sora be trapped like that triggered something in her, and she immediately summoned her bow and arrow. She knew what she must do now, it was the same trick she had used before.

"Fire!" She shouted as her arrow was lit with flames. She shot it at Vexen relentlessly, and he blocked every one of her arrows. She decided to change targets. There was only one way to unfreeze Sora. If she missed, she could hurt him, even kill him. But she had to try. She pulled her arrow back, and shot to break the ice. Her first shot missed, and set the field on fire, but her second nearly hit Sora in the shoulder. The ice melted, and the three were prepared to fight.

"Just like we talked about everyone! Ventus, you focus on healing Sora. Sora, I'll cover for you from back here. Are you ready?" Kairi commanded. Both boys nodded. "Then let's go!"

Ventus threw his Marbles at Vexen, focuses on just putting out ones filled with fire spells. There were still a couple that didn't comply, but as the Marbles were thrown, Sora made sure to let Vexen charge at him. Vexen was easily blocking Sora's attacks, which made him frustrated. Now the field was surrounded by fire, thanks to Kairi's arrows. They had the element advantage, but Sora wasn't able to directly hit Vexen. Kairi and Amphitrite immediately took matters into their own hands.

"Sora, make your Special Weapon!" Kairi shouted at him.

"Right!" Sora nodded. Suddenly, two guns appeared in front of Sora. This was his first time using his special attack, and he didn't realize that they moved at the will of his mind. He started shooting fire at Vexen, and while he was distracted by Sora, Kairi jumped behind him.

"You really think I'm going to fall for that? I am a scientist who has researched your every move, I know the games you play!" Vexen turned around, shooting a piece of ice at Kairi.

"Kairi!" Sora shouted as she was tossed backwards.

"I'm fine, just keep fighting!" She called back as she tried to get her bearings. Ventus watched as Kairi held onto her stomach, unable

to make another arrow. Vexen then turned to Ventus.

"I wonder, what would happen if Kairi stayed in ice permanently, in this current state?" Vexen then turned towards her, charging his shield before sending out a block of ice. Ventus and Aurai charged forward, and Ventus threw his Marbles at Vexen, which exploded on his back in a fiery chaos. Ventus slammed his Keyblade on Vexen's back, before he fell to the ground. This distract stopped the spell, and Kairi sighed in relief. As Vexen was fading away, they returned to the white hallways they had been in before. It was just an illusion, Ventus had been right.

"No, you didn't-"

Ventus looked away, running over to Kairi to help her, ignoring the fact that Vexen was dying. But Sora watched as the Nobody faded away.

"You shouldn't underestimate the Spider Riders." Sora spoke with a sense of finality as Vexen reached out at him. Sora stepped backwards. The group put their Spiders back inside of their Manacles, and slummed up towards the wall. Kairi was bleeding from her stomach now, and Ventus was tending to her.

"Thank you, for saving me."

"I knew you could have saved yourself, but, I wanted to help you." Ventus smiled at her as he used his magic to heal her. Sora breathed heavily.

"What did he mean, about Riku falling into the Darkness?" Sora asked the two. Kairi shook her head.

"Riku's fine. They're doing this to trick you, Sora. To make you scared." Kairi bit down on her tongue after she had spoken. She was trying to get this idea into his head so that later, when they confronted Larxene, it would be little surprise to him that she was telling a lie. She didn't want Sora and Ventus to know. She grimaced in pain as Ventus tried to assist her.

"You all took out Vexen. Another person I could care less about you defeating." Kairi jumped at the voice. She saw the familiar bee-like Invectid, Larxene come into their view. Larxene started laughing at Kairi's face.

"Watching you all fight is so much fun!" Larxene smiled at them. "Especially you, Kairi. I mean, you have been a Spider Rider for the longest out of you four." She smugly watched as Kairi's expression changed to fear. Ventus and Sora also seemed to jump in surprise.

"Quit the games! Where's Riku?"

"If it's Riku you're worried about, I see why. He's one of your only friends who has been honest with you. And even Riku has his secrets." Larxene covered her mouth as she laughed. "Oops, was I not supposed to tell them, Kairi?" She taunted her as Kairi attempted to stand up.

"What are you talking about?" Ventus stepped in front of Kairi,

protecting her with his Keyblade.

"Do you think I'm just going to tell you? That would be way too easy. You're supposed to be the Spider Riders!" She spoke dramatically, in a fake shock that Ventus and Sora just weren't getting it. She sighed dramatically waving her hand to the side. "I'm sure it'll kill you to hear this, Sora, Ventus, but for some odd reason I think I can live with that. In fact I think it would make my job of getting rid of you so much easier." She smiled as Sora charged towards her, for him to only be kicked back. "You see, Kairi here was from The Inner World all along, and she didn't even bother to tell you? All those years, you and Kairi dreamed about where she could have came from and she lied saying she didn't remember?" She put her hand on Sora's shoulder, circling him. "Isn't that the truth, Kairi?" She then walked over to Kairi, tossing Ventus out of the way as she lifted her chin with her jaw. Kairi didn't dare move a muscle, knowing that if Larxene hit her with her knives it would paralyze and kill her.

"Kairi, is that true?" Sora asked her, reaching out his arm to pull her away from Larxene and pull her close to him.

"You're so stupid! Of course it's true! Go on, Kairi. Tell him yourself. Tell him that your home was really in Radiant Gardens. Tell him that all of these years at any time, you could have gone back to save your home Kingdom, but you were just too scared to even try and become a Spider Rider." Larxene raised her voice at her. "You have no conscious, no heart! You left your family to die!" She swatted Kairi to the side, and she slammed against the wall.

"Kairi!" Ventus jumped to her side.

"What, are you actually upset? You don't even know her! Neither of you do." She smiled at Sora. Sora shook his head.

"Kairiâ€¦ if Kairi didn't want to tell meâ€¦ thenâ€¦ I don't blame her for that." Sora used his Keyblade to help him stand up. "I'm sad, that Kairi didn't trust me enough to tell me this, butâ€¦ Iâ€¦ I care about Kairi, more than anything."

"Soraâ€¦ Iâ€¦" Kairi's voice trialed off as she spoke. Tears were falling heavily down her face at all of Larxene's words. The guilt she felt about leaving The Inner World was greated than anything she had ever felt before, but to hear Sora speaking to her like this, and Ventus protecting her with his last couple of breaths, meant the world to her. It erased her fear and guilt away. That feeling made her cry more.

"No, Kairi, let me finish!" Sora replied. "Kairi, I always said that I'd protect you. That Riku and I would protect you. And that would never change. Not ever. You can leave me in the dark about all of your secrets, or you can tell me the truth. But it doesn't matter now. That doesn't matter to me." He then turned to Larxene. "All that matters is that you're upsetting her! And I refuse to let you make Kairi cry!" Sora pointed his Keyblade at Larxene again. She had nothing else to say to him. She would let her weapons speak for themselves.

Larxene launched herself forward at Sora, throwing her knives at him. He knew they wouldn't go through his armour, but when they hit it

even still a shock went through him. Watching Sora fight, Ventus got an idea. He watched as Kairi's eyes shut. He knew that if they didn't get help for her fast that she may not wake up again. He was determined to protect her. He put Marbles down on the ground. He groaned as some of them were the wrong type. He didn't want to use Thunder right now, it would just made her stronger. He gritted his teeth as Larxene stepped over them, getting energy and punching Sora in the face. He tried again, trying to focus on Kairi. He put out the marbles again, this time using Blizzard and Fire.

"Sora, step over the Marbles!" Ventus called to him.

"You want me to what?" Sora looked at him in disbelief.

"Listen to me! I don't have time to explain it to you, just do it!" Ventus commanded him as he quickly took action. Sora wondered if he and Arenite could both take the hit. They did as Ventus told them too, and Larxene took this as an opportunity to use her knives on Arenite. As she stabbed the knife into Arenite's back, he jumped backwards, taking Sora with him. The floor was watery now, the Fire melting the Blizzard spell. Sora then realized what he had to do. He needed to get Larxene to use one of her attacks.

"Is that all you've got, Larxene?!" Sora yelled to her at the other side of the hall.

"I'll show you, you little brat!" Larxene now charged herself up for an attack, and Ventus watched in horror and amazement as Larxene electrocuted herself.

Sora and Ventus thought that they would feel guilty, but after everything Larxene did, they only felt relief and further anger. Arenite was bleeding as Larxene faded away.

"No, you didn't! This can't be happeningâ€¦ I wasn'tâ€¦ it wasn't supposed toâ€¦" Her voice trialed off as she disappeared into the darkness. Ventus picked up Kairi in his arms and turned to Sora.

"I'm sorry we had to do that." Ventus told him, putting his hand on Sora's shoulder.

"I'm not. Kairi's really hurt." Sora looked down at his friend. He hadn't been lying to Larxene, he was sad that Kairi didn't tell him the truth, but he understood. He couldn't imagine what it would be like living with the knowledge that his home was destroyed, and he was the only survivor. And maybe Kairi thought that she could stop it and felt guilty, but Sora knew too well looking at this world and the Invectids that Kairi was a child, how much could she really have done? But in a way he was happy. He was able to bring Kairi back to her home. Maybe they could even find Radiant Gardens, and see it's current state. He was too busy being concerned about Kairi to be jealous about how Ventus was carrying her. They both walked up ahead, wondering if it would be their last battle, if they would make it out alive or face defeat. And in all this, where in the world was Riku?

8. The Finale of Fragrant Blooms

The Castle shook as Riku woke back up. Ã‰benos and him felt as well-rested as they could now. Riku could still see the Invectid's face in his head, but he knew that he had to find the others and push onward.

"That sounded troublesome." Ã‰benos told Riku as they both rode through the halls.

"Indeed it is." A mosquito in an Organization 13 Coat, which sported messy grey bangs at the front of his head stood in front of a large door. "The keeper of this castle, and the head of this execution, Marluxia has just been felled by the Spider Riders." He laughed dryly. "Axel and I were taking bets on who would be next to fall, after they destroyed the others."

"Well I guess that it's going to be you next!" Riku shouted at the figure.

"Am I, though?" He asked Riku, crossing his arms. "The Spider Riders are supposed to battle the darkness, yet, you used your darkness to murder Lexaeus." He empathized each word, obviously touched by Lexaeus' death. "They oppose everyone who hosts the dark, because they stop Kingdom Hearts' sun from glowing. You are one of those people, Riku." He smiled at him. "You hated being an islander! And so when you saw Terra he took his final power, and he was taken by the darkness, because of you! It was you, Riku. You destroyed Terra."

Riku's face fell as the Organization 13 member spoke to him. He shook his head. Had he done that? Did Terra use the last of his power to give him the Keyblade? Could Terra have lived if he hadn't told him what he truly wanted?

"What would Queen Aqua say, if she knew that you destroyed her brother!?"He shouted at Riku as he looked down at the ground.

"Evenâ€¦ even if that's what happenedâ€¦ I'll make it up to her! I'll make it up to her by saving this world, and bringing Terra back!" Riku proclaimed to him. He pointed his Keyblade at him, still on the back of Ã‰benos. Darkness pooled around the bottom of Riku's enemy, giving him the ability to glide as three books floated around him. He lifted his hands, making a geyser that was shooting out Invectid Heartless. They covered Riku and his Battle Spider. As the duo were distracted, his foe made pages of his books form in a circle, sending off a large beam that hit both Riku and his Battle Spider. They were both taken back, and were being consumed by the darkness. What was Riku supposed to do? If he didn't tap into that power again, they would both die! He focused hard on the anger he had felt before, and his rage turned into dark power that he used to destroy the Invectid Heartless, the bug-like creatures that were in front of him. He screamed as Darkness flowed from his Keyblade. He took out the creatures, using hate and rage for the Organization 13.

"Despite your protests, Riku, you're just like one of us."

"You're wrong!" Riku jumped forward, slashing at him. But the Invectid, though in some pain, jumped backwards into a portal, disappearing from Riku's vision.

"Riku!"

Riku could hear Sora's voice from afar, in the distance. He couldn't let Sora see him like this. He felt himself fall to the ground, and at that moment, though weak, he looked up at Sora and Ventus, bloodied and battered, with Kairi on Ven's face.

"What happened?" Riku asked Sora, as the white halls started disappearing, and they were instead back in the empty fields of flowers. Sora hugged him.

"I'm so glad you're okay!" Sora smiled at his friend.

"Well, we defeated the person behind all thisâ€¦" Ventus started retelling the story to Riku.

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Sora and Ventus rode on their Battle Spiders, ready for the final fight that they would have ahead of them. Before them, in a grand ballroom they saw NaminÃ©, and a pink haired butterfly with radiant coloured wings.

"Ah, the Keyblade's power, how I've longed for it to be mine." NaminÃ© flipped her hair, smiling at the two. Ventus was still holding Kairi.

"You've no chance of winning now." Marluxia also had a small smile on his face.

"NaminÃ©! Why are you doing this, you're a human!?" Ventus asked her, putting Kairi on Aurai's back before he walked forward to her.

"Isn't it obvious? I have much more potential to be just an ordinary human. I could have been a great Spider Rider." NaminÃ© gave a small smile to Ventus, putting a hand on his shoulder. "I have the power to create illusions, similar to Zexion. But stronger than that. I can create memories, get rid of memories, and even destroy them completely. I was outcasted for my powers, and I was rejected when I tried to become a Spider Rider. So, I came here." NaminÃ© explained to him. He stepped backward a bit. "Speaking of memoriesâ€¦ I think it's time to destroy Sora's." She gave a sweet smile to Ventus, before grabbing her sketchbook and drawing something.

"There's no way you can do that!" Sora retorted to her, taking out his Keyblade.

"She can, in fact, your heart will be destroyed. I wanted you all unmarred, but in time, I'm sure with some fake memories, Saix would be able to make you like his Poppet." Marluxia said calmly. NaminÃ© seemed to be drawing in the air now, and a giant hole of darkness was headed towards Sora, tossing out chains like shackles around his heart. Marluxia laughed as Sora tried to defeat himself.

"No! Sora!" It was Kairi's voice, as she had jumped in the way of her friend. The chains surrounded her, but a valiant light destroyed the darkness, chain by chain.

"Kairi!"

"Sora, you forgave me even after I deceived you. I can't justâ€¦ let them take your memory and make you an empty shell! I'll be gone soon anyway!" Kairi shouted back at him, screaming in agony as the chains disappeared.

"Noâ€¦" NaminÃ©'s voice trialed off.

"NaminÃ©! Why didn't it work?!" Marluxia asked her angrily.

"Her heart. It's pure light. I can't touch her." NaminÃ© shouted back at him irritatedly. "But she's right, she'll surely die soon, and when she does, we can destroy their memories."

"I wanted the girl alive." Marluxia spat at her.

"We can't always have what we want, Marluxia!" NaminÃ© jumped backwards, preparing for battle.

"Go send word to Saix." Marluxia ordered her. She nodded, disappearing into a dark portal. Marluxia lifted his pink scythe. "I will reap your souls, and be the last thing you see before your death." Flower petals came out of him every time he moved, but as Ventus and Sora both raced towards him, he made a whirlpool of thornbush and petals, removing the ground from under both them and their Battle Spiders. Sora felt like he was falling into a thornbush. They both looked back up to see Marluxia connected to a human-type heartless, with a silverhood, angel wings, and a scythe. He was glowing, shooting attacks from his being as the being behind him swiped at Ventus and Sora.

"If we can take out Marluxia, we can get rid of the thing behind him, they're connected!" Sora told Ventus as the ground quaked when the Heartless hit the ground with her Scythe, breaking the floor of the ballroom. As it slammed down, a pink tornado of petals surrounded them, pushing them both backwards. Ventus quickly saw an opportunity: The Scythe the Heartless was using was stuck in the ground. Ventus and Aurai quickly used their webs to secure it for a moment so they could ride up it, and attack Marluxia from above. Ventus flew back up in the air as the Scythe moved back up near the top of the ballroom. Ventus started dropping his Marbles, balls of fire which erupted greatly when they hit the ground. Though Marluxia was strong, he had to stay in place in order to control the heartless behind him, and so he could do nothing about this. The Heartless was slow to react. A typhoon of thorns and petals attacked Sora on the ground, making him vomit when it was over. He tried to gain his bearings as he summoned his shooters to disable Marluxia. A pink beam hit Sora in the stomach, making him go back further. He saw Kairi, lying at the back of the room helplessly. Was she dead? The fear inside him mortified him. He didn't even get a chance to fully tell her how much he cared about her. The revelation filled him to the brim with sadness, and Marluxia was the one responsible. His shooters moved on their own, shooting blue beams of light attacked Marluxia relentlessly. Ventus dropped attacks on from below, but the Scythe sliced deep into his arm as he retried to get away from the heartless, nearly taking it off. Ventus, now in pain and not able to do anything but heal himself, tried to direct Sora on what to do. Sora attacked Marluxia with vigor and determination, and every time he was blown backwards

or hit, him and Arenite got back up. With one, powerful blow they were brought back to the end of the ballroom again.

"We can't do this, Sora!" Arenite protested.

"We have to do it, if we don't, Riku, and Ventus, and Kairiâ€¦ Kairiâ€¦" His voice trialed off. "We'll all die, and then Aqua will kill us!" Sora tried to play it off as a joke, but he had to admit that he was nothing short of terrified to continue going into battle like this, barely dodging blows and feeling like his power was doing nothing to the Invectid.

"How does it feel, Sora? To not have nightmares? To not be afraid of anything? I heard that Riku said, only beings without hearts, without feelings are afraid of nothing."

"You're lying!" Sora brought his blade down on Marluxia, digging it into his shoulder. The Scythe came down on him, and Sora rolled out of the way and off of his Spider, who had jumped backwards. Sora drove his Keyblade into Marluxia's side, before running up the Scythe, and hacking at the Heartless' head. Ventus had never seen Sora act so brutally, but they all had on this day. The Heartless screamed in agony as Sora attacked the Fallen Angel directly, and Ventus watched as Marluxia was sliced by the Scythe. Marluxia screamed in agony as him and his Heartless were reduced to nothing more than falling petals.

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Kairi found herself asleep in a room that was decorated for a little girl. She couldn't help but wonder if this was Queen Aqua's room when she was young. She didn't remember how they had gotten back home, and she was certain she was supposed to be memoryless and dead. She turned her head to see a bandaged Sora, his head, waist, and arms wrapped tightly, and a similarly bandaged Riku, with a cast on his wrist. They both had their hands on her hands, holding both of them tightly in their own.

"Kairi, I'm so glad you're okay!" Sora said to her, rubbing his slightly to try and cover up the fact that he was about to cry. Kairi nodded. She could see herself in the mirror at the end of the room. She had a light scar on her face from where Larxene had cut her, and she could feel the bandages and stitches in her stomach.

"I'm so sorry, Sora, Riku." Both boys shook their head.

"I have a secret too, Kairi." Riku told her. "But when I said I couldn't tell you, you didn't push me. So why would we be mad?"

"We want you to know that you can trust us, but you don't need to tell us everything, Kairi. We're your friends no matter what." Sora gave her a small smile. Kairi felt both boys embrace her tightly, and they heard a knock at the door. It was Queen Aqua, in all of her radiance, and Ventus, who had a cast around his arm.

"Forgive me." Queen Aqua started. Sora and Riku bowed to her, and Kairi bowed her head.

"Forgive us." Sora corrected her. "You said to bring back Ventus in one piece, but his arm was practically falling off-" Riku stepped on Sora's foot before he could finish speaking. Queen Aqua was not amused, and seemed to be caught up in her own affairs.

"I should have known that it was a trap. I'm so very sorry, to all of you." Aqua bowed her head at the four Spider Riders before she started curtsying.

"We took out a good chunk of the Organization. It was no problem, you're majesty." Sora leaned backwards, putting his arms behind his head.

"Marluxia, Larxene, Lexaeus, and Vexen. Riku, who said that an unknown member got away?" She asked him. He seemed ashamed that he had let an Invectid go.

"Yes, I don't know his status."

"And there's an Invectid Replica of Riku, with memories given to it by a human girl, NaminÃ©? You assume?" She asked them. Riku nodded.

"I'm the only one who encountered the Replica, but if what Sora's says is true, and that NaminÃ© had the powers to create memories, I think she gave him some of mine, or at least, something to give him emotion and purpose." Riku explained to Aqua. Aqua nodded to him.

"That's all the information I need to collect." Queen Aqua stated before turning to leave the room. "Actually, Riku. Come with me, please." She asked him. Riku simply nodded at the request, though he was slightly taken aback, and his face was slightly red. They walked in the gardens of the castle, something that Aqua had been tending to. Riku recognized this right away, as Aqua brought beauty to the castle amidst chaos.

"Riku, you seem troubled." Aqua asked him as they both sat on a bench near the roses.

"Iâ€¦ I guess after seeing the Invectids, I don't want to fall into the darkness." Riku didn't want to lie to Aqua, but he didn't want to say he felt the darkness inside of him.

"Riku, there is darkness and light inside of every creature. Is it how you use both powers that matter. As a Spider Rider, you should only use light as your strength, however, to destroy all the darkness within you, would be to destroy a part of yourself. Do you understand? You need both to survive." Aqua explained to him, with a kindness surrounding her voice. Riku instantly felt better after hearing Aqua say this. He sighed heavily at first, and she put her hand on his shoulder. "The Invectids destroy all that is good in the world. I know that destroying them puts a toll on you, but you're fighting for people's lives, for your lives, for a better future for everyone." She stood up. "Someday, I want everyone to be at peace. Human or not." She turned around, looking towards her flowers. She gave a small smile to Riku as she disappeared, back inside of the castle. He heard a taunting voice from the window.

"Riku, you must be in love!" Sora teased him, waving at him from up

in Kairi's room. Riku rolled his eyes.

"You better be glad that my wrist is broken!" Riku shouted at him, before running back into the castle and up the stairs. Sora and Riku both sat in the lounge playing card games as Kairi was resting. Ventus wouldn't leave her side, and Kairi was glad for the company.

Kairi wasn't someone who considered herself vain, but every time she looked in the mirror she hated the scar on her face. She frowned at herself, which caught Ventus' attention.

"Kairi." He made eye contact with her as she sighed. "What's wrong?" He asked her, already knowing the answer.

"Do you think it'll go away?"

"You know we don't care about that, Kairi."

"I know, but I do. Is that so bad?" Kairi lied back in her bed, looking at Ventus' melancholy expression. Ventus took in a deep breath. Maybe he could cheer her up if he told her the truth.

"I think that it looks cool. You look like a real tough warrior." Ventus tried to give her a small smile. He felt himself recoil on the inside. That wasn't what he had wanted to say. He opened his mouth again and spoke quickly, trying not to lose his nerve. "I mean it's not like what I think really matters anyway but, what I mean to say is-" He stopped suddenly before speaking again. "Kairi, from the first moment I saw you I thought you were beautiful! Nothing will change that. You should be able to see that too. That's why I'm telling you. So you can, uh, see it." Ventus finally was able to get all of the words out of his mouth, and Kairi smiled sweetly. A tear fell from her eye. "I'm sorry!"

She started laughing, wiping the tear from her face.

"You're so sweet, Ventus."

Ventus blushed as she spoke, and she continued laughing sweetly. Eventually, him and Kairi were able to join Riku and Sora, growing closer and closer each day. But as each day grew past, all they could think of was when the Invectids were going to strike next.

9. Xaldin: Riku, or the Wayfinder

**Sora, Kairi, Riku, and Ventus did not run into anymore of the members of Organization 13. Heartless and Nobodies attacked towns and villages, but they were mindless creatures and nothing that Sora and Riku couldn't handle. Kairi and Ventus spend their time walking through the Kingdom, and visiting the citizens in the hospital together. Upon Riku's return to the Caste, he walked into the throne room to see Queen Aqua, reporting back on what he saw in battle. She made a journal about the Heartless and Nobodies, giving them each names and definitions. As he walked down the hallway, he saw something startling. He was surrounded by Pureblood Heartless. Ã‰benos and him jumped backwards as the Invectids came towards them, but Riku easily used his Keyblade to destroy them. He didn't know where he could find Aqua's chambers, but behind the thrones was a

hidden, winding staircase in which he assumed Aqua stayed. He saw the hidden room behind the wall, it not being put back properly. He put Ã‰benos in Manacle Space, before walking slowly. He heard Aqua talking to someone on the other side of the door.**

"You must see the truth, about Riku." A low, husky, accented voice spoke loudly to the Queen.

Queen Aqua was standing by the window, looking out at the Kingdom below. Her room was dark and dusty, similar to the castle. A man in a black coat spoke to her, while the other similarly dressed man stood by and watched his pupil. She didn't know where they had came from, or what their intentions were, but she wanted to hear what they had to say without bloodshed.

"I confronted Riku in Castle Oblivion myself. The only member to get away unscaved. We were able to peer into Riku's nightmares, and see his deepest fears. Terra was killed by this boy. A human cloaked in darkness is hiding among you, and you are too blind to see this!" The silver-haired mosqutio spoke to Aqua.

"I will not resign myself to your mindless babbling!" Aqua yelled back at him angrily, summoning her Keyblade.

"He is plotting to work with the side of darkness. First, he took your brothers life, but now, he will take yours. Trust no one, Aqua. Feed your grief and anger. Become strong." The voice encouraged.

"And what if I refuse? You have no proof, it's your word against his own!" Queen Aqua shouted at both of the figures. "I am already strong enough. I've had enough of strength. I want-"

"What? Happiness? Love? That's a pathetic dream of fancy. You will never be able to be happy without Terra." The huskier voiced man spoke to her.

"I refuse to believe that Terra is dead!" Aqua pointed her Keyblade towards them both. "Leave my castle

As Riku listened through the door, his eyes went wide. She knew. He wanted to tell her, to make it up to her. But he was too late. He hated her. If he stormed in now, she would only see the truth. But who was on the other side? Was it an Invectid? Was she in danger? He couldn't be the one to rescue her. She would destroy him. Riku felt like a coward, but like the coward he was, he ran. He ran to Ventus, Sora, and Kairi, all out enjoying the sun and the fresh Inner World air.

"Riku!" Kairi smiled at him, before realizing the panic on his face.

"Riku, what's wrong?" Sora asked him, putting his hand on his shoulder.

"It's Queen Aqua. She's in danger!" Riku told the three. Ventus jumped up.

"What?! Why did you just leave her, Riku?" Ventus ran through the doors, Kairi muttering something before running in after him.

"Come on, we have to go help her." Sora pulled on Riku as he ran forward, but Riku didn't move.

"Sora, I have to go."

"What? Riku!" Sora looked at him with shock and confusion.

"Take care of Kairi, and The Queen. There's something I need to go do." He put his hand on Sora's shoulder, before running out the other gate to leave the castle.

"Riku! Wait!" Sora called after him. But Riku didn't turn around. Riku felt guilty for lying to Sora, for not telling him why he was really leaving. But what other choice did he have?

"Riku, this is impulsive and ridiculous, you can't do this!" Ã‰benos yelled to him as they were leaving the Kingdom.

"You know better than anyone. You know what the Organization Member said." Riku retorted. "I can't stay here. I can't be a Spider Rider. Not like this. I need to figure out how I can bring Terra back." Riku told his Battle Spider. Ã‰benos went quiet. He had to stay with Riku to ensure his safety. He knew that Sora would come back to them soon.

Sora, Ventus, and Kairi ran into the throne room, which was filled with Nobodies and Heartless. Queen Aqua stood beside a man in a black coat, seeing the wings of a dragonfly on his back.

"Where is Riku?!" Queen Aqua demanded, the Nobodies stationary for a moment, before launching themselves at Sora.

"Sora, where did he go? What's going on?" Kairi asked Sora. Sora looked at Queen Aqua, seeing the rage on her face, and darkness melting out of her body.

"Your Majesty, Riku told me he had to go do something important. But we're here to help you!" Sora pointed his Keyblade at the hooded figure.

"Aqua, why are there Nobodies in the castle?!" Ventus asked her, going up to her to try and calm her down. She pushed Ventus away, before screaming in agony. The hooded figure disappeared, and the Nobodies jumped forward at Sora.

"Kairi, get Ventus out of here. His arm is still broken he shouldn't be here!" Sora yelled to Kairi. She nodded to him, launching herself and her Battle Spider to pick up Ventus before taking him out of the great hall. Kairi returned quickly, ready to fight along Sora. Kairi and Sora were back to back, pointing their weapons at the Nobodies.

"Are you ready?" She asked him. He nodded. Kairi launched herself forward at the spiky Nobodies, having her Battle Spider jump on top of them as her weapon came down on their heads. She still resorted to physical combat, punching the Nobodies whenever she couldn't use her Keyblade. Sora on the other hand used his Shooters right away, still on an emotional high from Riku leaving. He and Arenite glided freely around the room, shooting at enemies that were hindering Kairi. She

threw her Keyblade across the room to stop a Nobody from jumping on Sora's back, summoning it before she could hit him. Soon enough, the Nobody threat was gone, and Queen Aqua remained.

"Your Majesty, can't you tell us what happened?" Sora asked her.

"Riku killed my brother, and for that he must pay." Queen Aqua stood up from her place on the floor. She had a look in her eyes that chilled Sora to the bone. "He killed Terra to get the Manacle, to become a Spider Rider!" She yelled at Kairi and Sora.

"There must be a mistake, Riku would never do that!" Kairi argued with her. "How can you trust members from Organization 13?"

"Why would Riku run if he wasn't guilty!? I need you both to bring him back." Aqua clenched her fists tightly, the darkness still surrounding her aura.

"Aqua, you're not thinking straight!" Ventus' voice could be heard coming through the door again. "There's something wrong with you." Ventus insisted. "We need to battle it out of her. That Organization 13 guy's taking advantage of her somehow." Ventus summoned his Keyblade. Though his other arm was useless, he was determined to fight.

"Fine, you want a fight, then so be it!" Aqua pointed to the sky before saying 'Archana power'. She wore blue armour.

Kairi pulled her arrow back, while Sora and Ventus launched themselves straight towards her on their Battle Spiders.

"What's Aqua's special weapon?" Kairi called out to Ventus. Ventus looked back to Kairi, as Aqua blocked both Sora and Ventus' attack with a 360 degree magical spell.

"Uh, it's hard to explain." Ventus called back to her. Aqua summoned bright blue markings on the wall, and as she jumped on them to stand sideways on the walls. As she jumped from one to the other, Sora and Ventus jumped backwards. When they were in range, she jumped across to another one of the magical spells. A giant beam of blue, electric light made a diagonal line from where she had first stood, to the back of the room. Kairi watched in amazement and horror as Sora and Ventus flew backwards.

"How do we beat this?" Sora asked them both.

"We don't! Aqua's the strongest person in all The Inner World, she's going to kill us!" Ventus called back to him. Aqua, moving with unimaginable speed, jumped to each spell, covering the room in the blue light. When the dust cleared, Aqua stood back on the throne, her head covered by the helmet of her armour.

"She doesn't even have her Battle Spider." Kairi tried to stand up, but she felt too dizzy and confused, as charred pieces of her hair fell off.

"She's too powerful." The words barely came out of Ventus' mouth before Sora ran forward. Their Keyblades both clashed. She blocked every one of Sora's hits in a swift movement, consumed in his

attacks. She brought her Keyblade up to Sora's wrist, making him drop his Keyblade. She pointed it at him as he was on the ground, stepping on him. As she lifted her Keyblade over his heart, Amphitrite and Aurai captured her in their web.

"She's at a disadvantage without her Battle Spider." Amphitrite pointed out.

"If we can contain her enough, she won't be able to move and you can disarm her." Aurai told the three warriors. They nodded. The Spiders jumped everywhere, from the wall, to the ceiling to make webs that could cocoon the Queen. When she was caught in their web, Sora and Ventus launched forward. Kairi could hear the clashing of the metal Keyblades on Aqua's armour, and eventually, the dark aura disappeared. They worked on removing the Queen from the web. She was unconscious now. They put her on the throne as they waited for her to wake up. Ventus waited at the foot of the throne, holding her hand as he waited for her to wake.

"Soraâ€¦ Kairi?" She looked at both of them curiously. "Ven." She smiled at him. "What happened in here?" Aqua could smell the burn on the walls, and see that Kairi's hair was slightly burnt as well.

"You attacked us!" Sora said bluntly.

"You said that Riku killed your brother, and you were covered in darkness." Kairi told her. Ventus nodded at both of their explanations.

"Xaldin... It was Xaldin who told me that. He has long black hair, and uses the wind. He's a dragonfly Invectid." Queen Aqua explained.

"Your Majesty, why did you let an Invectid into the castle?" Kairi asked, her voice full of concern.

"He told me he had information about Riku. Andâ€¦ I just remember being so heartbroken." Aqua put her clenched hand over the middle of her chest.

"Aqua, Riku would never hurt you, he lo-" Before Ventus could finish, the hooded figure appeared again, this time, with an unconscious Riku in his arms. In his other hand, a talisman.

"The Wayfinder!" Aqua felt her pockets, feeling for the blue object that was in Xaldin's hands.

"Riku!" Sora shouted, reaching his arm out as if he could touch Riku.

"He took the Wayfinder?" Ventus asked, Aqua nodded.

"Forget about the stupid jewelry, what about Riku!"

"You don't know anything about it!" Aqua shouted at Sora.

"Sora, you don't understand-" Ventus tried to talk, but Xaldin spoke instead.

"Xaldin, you have brought darkness into my castle, get out of here, now!" Aqua shouted, summoning her Keyblade, her voice with no patience.

"With pleasure, but I have to say that I would rather travel lightly. The magic on this Wayfinder is too heavy for my liking." Xaldin smiled sinisterly. "So what should I leave behind, Riku, or your Wayfinder? The man who killed your brother, or the only thing you have left of him." Xaldin gave her the ultimatum.

Kairi felt her own Wayfinder, the one she had wanted to give to Sora in her pocket. She knew how much it meant to her, so she couldn't imagine what it meant to Aqua. And what if Riku _did _kill Terra? How could she expect Aqua to save him? She didn't want to believe it was true. There was a silence in the room that was unlike anything else she had heard before. A ringing was in her ears, and she could hear her own heart beating, her blood moving through her veins.

Sora looked over at the Queen. Queen or no Queen, he refused to let her hurt Riku. He didn't care what Riku did, he was more important than a silly good luck charm. Ventus looked at his sister. He wasn't going to fault her for what she chose. He knew she would never forget about Terra, even without the Wayfinder. Their bond was greater than that. It had to be.

Aqua looked at the Wayfinder. It was all she had left of Terra. He still had his, wherever he was. She needed this so they would always come back to each other. But she looked at Riku. Terra chose this boy. Terra chose this boy with the intention that this boy would become a Keyblade Master. Even if Riku killed Terra, that was the truth. Terra wanted this boy to be a Spider Rider. If Terra was dead, if this was his last dying wish, despite everything Riku had done, or had yet to do, Terra had wanted this. Riku was strong, Riku had impressed her. Maybe Riku had made a mistake. But there was one thing for certain:

"No one deserves to be held captive by the darkness! Give Riku back!" Queen Aqua and jumped into the air to catch Riku, as Xaldin threw him from where he flew above. She caught him in her arms.

"Sora. Take your friend to his room, call the royal nurse - now!" Aqua ordered Sora. Sora nodded, him and Arenite leaving Aqua, Ventus, and Kairi to fight Xaldin, who had summoned three lances, two in one hand and one in the other, while four floated around him. He shot the lances at Aqua, making her jump backwards as they almost stabbed her. The lances circled her, and as they did, giant beams of light hit her, making her cry out in agony. Kairi brought her arrow back, taking shots at the Dragonfly. Ventus threw the Marbles at him, but they went into the tornado that Aqua had been caught in, and caused her an even worse pain. When Aqua was able to escape from the tornado, Xaldin made a giant dragonfly out of his many lances. It worked together to shoot a laser of wind at the group. Aqua put a mark in front of her, so when it hit her she sent a beam backwards as well. Ventus and Kairi were tossed up into the air, and Ventus was sent unconscious. Aqua then filled the room with the magical marks, jumping off of them to avoid Xaldin's attacks as Kairi and Amphitrite flung themselves around the room to avoid being hit anymore then they already were.

"Kairi, do it now!" Aqua jumped behind her. Aqua had made a web of

her special weapon, and Kairi suddenly understood. They couldn't jump on all of them at once. She quickly created 5 arrows, and one at a time, shot them at the marks with great speed. The girls felt the hall shake as Xaldin was disintegrated by flame and electricity.

When they looked back, there was nothing but black smoke. Aqua's Wayfinder was safe, shining in the middle of the floor. She picked it up, ignoring the stench in the room.

"Kairi, please take Ventus to his room. I have to see Riku." The Queen ordered her. She nodded, amazed at Aqua's power. The marks made beams, connections to the other marks to make long beams of energy. How long did that take her to master? Were Terra and Aqua really this powerful? But she noticed as the Queen left, she held her chest, in pain, as if she were having a heart attack. She limped off when she thought Kairi wasn't looking, but Kairi couldn't help but wonder if that attack was too much for her.

Aqua walked into Riku's room, no longer in armour but instead in her dress. Riku didn't remember what happened to him, but when he saw Aqua, his face turned red in shame and he jumped. He was shaking in fear at her neutral expression.

"Riku." She said on the edge of his bed, inches away from him. She moved his hair out of his face.

Was he still dreaming? He didn't know. He didn't know how he could face her if what they said was true. He had to say something before she did.

"I know, you want me to leave the castle. Maybe you even want my life. I didn't mean to, I don't even know if I did-" Riku

"Are you hurt?" Aqua asked him quietly, her voice with a slight sweetness. He shook his head. "That's all that matters then. I'm glad you're safe." Aqua hushed him. She ran her hand through his hair. "You didn't see, but I was taken by the darkness for a moment. In my grief, I couldn't see the obvious, that the Organization 13 members are trying to take us apart. But we won't go down." She stood up, looking out the window of Riku's room. Riku was amazed at her composure and her apology. How could she be so calm.

"Terra was in between a battle, before he gave you the Keyblade. At least that's what I assume. We were all fightingâ€¦ andâ€¦ that's when he disappeared. I don't believe he's dead, but even if he is, maybe he used his last bit of strength to give you the Keyblade. Maybe if he didn't he would have been fine. But I don't care about that now. You were chosen by Terra, this was his wish, Riku. And I intend to make sure his hope for you was realized. You are so strong. And I feel like this is my fault." Aqua admitted to him.

Riku was stunned and amazed. She spoke so powerfully, with such purpose and passion. He wanted to say something to her, but no words came out.

"Queen Aqua, I-"

"Riku, it's okay." She turned back and smiled at him, though her eyes were filled with tears. "I remember seeing you too, on the island.

You and Sora were playing, and Terra had chosen you. Do you remember that?"

"But Aqua, we're so close in age, how can that be possible?" Riku asked her.

"Time works differently here in The Inner World. But don't doubt the truth in that statement. I didn't chose Sora even though I saw great potential in him, because I didn't want you to fight. But here you are, working together. I'm so happy. And I want you both on my team. I really do." She gave him one last smile, before she turned to leave.

"Queen Aqua, I promise that I will fulfill every expectation you and Terra had or would have had of me. I swear on my life." Riku tried to speak with as much passion as she had before. He wanted her to know how much he truly cared, and how much she captivated him as a warrior and as a person, that he had so much respect for her and everything she stood for. She was everything in a universe of nothing. That's how he saw her. Queen Aqua laughed sweetly.

"I don't doubt. You all are meant for very great things, and the Invectids know this too, so be ready."

End
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